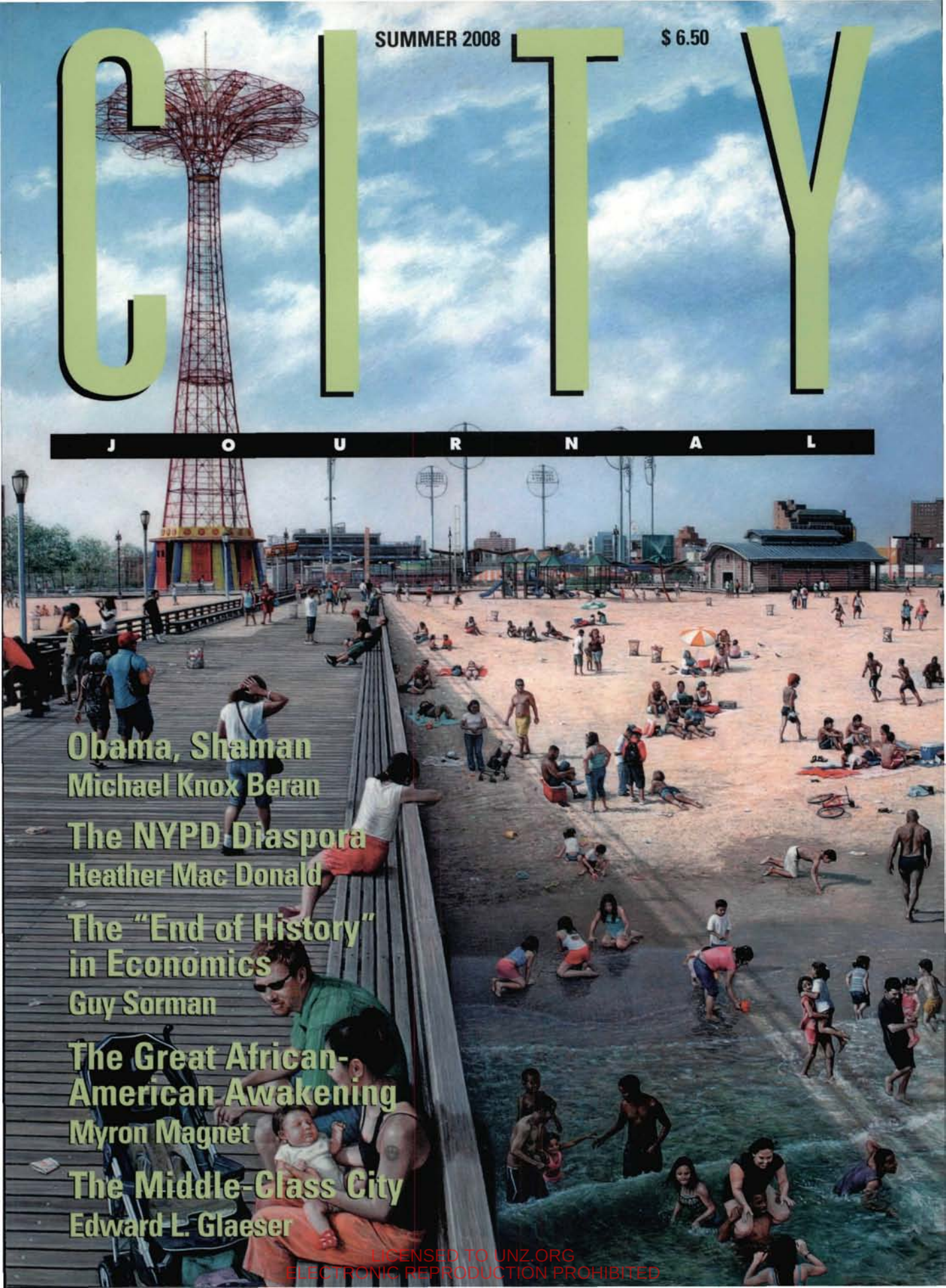
SUMMER 2008 $ 6.50

CITY

JOURNAL



Obama, Shaman
Michael Knox Beran

The NYPD Diaspora
Heather Mac Donald

The "End of History" in Economics
Guy Sorman

The Great African-American Awakening
Myron Magnet

The Middle-Class City
Edward L. Glaeser

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[illegible]

1,250 Students, Eager to Achieve

Like many New York City students, Miesha Etheridge was at risk. Orphaned as an infant, she was raised by her elderly grandmother. Miesha didn't have any option but to attend public high school, and she was worried about it—with good reason. NYC's public schools have only a 43% graduation rate, and for African-American and Hispanic students, those numbers are even lower.

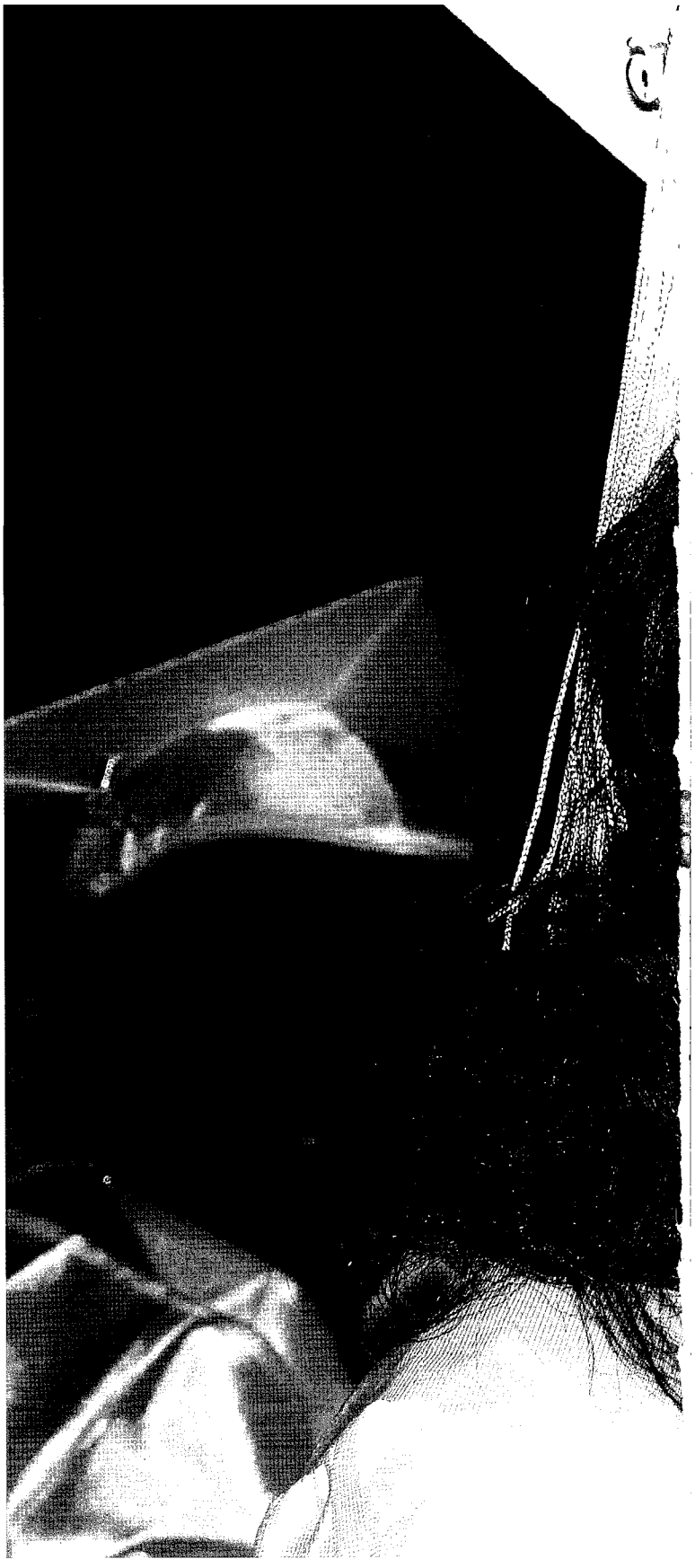
So SSP stepped in. We paired Miesha with a Sponsor, who helped pay for her to go to one of our 20 Partner Schools. Tuition is less than half what City high schools spend per student, but last year 84% of SSP students graduated on time, and 96% went on to college.

With the help of her caring Sponsor and a school that worked, Miesha made it through high school and is now in college.

You too can make a difference in an at-risk student's life. Hundreds of students need your help. To become a Sponsor or to make a gift, please contact us at:

Student Sponsor Partners
21 East 40th Street, Suite 1601
New York, NY 10011
(212) 986-9575
www.sspnyc.org

STUDENT
SPONSOR
PARTNERS



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CITY
JOURNAL
Published by the Manhattan Institute
Summer 2008 Volume 18, Number 3

Editor
Brian C. Anderson

Senior Editor
Steven Malanga

Managing Editor
Benjamin A. Plotinsky

Associate Editor
Paul Beston

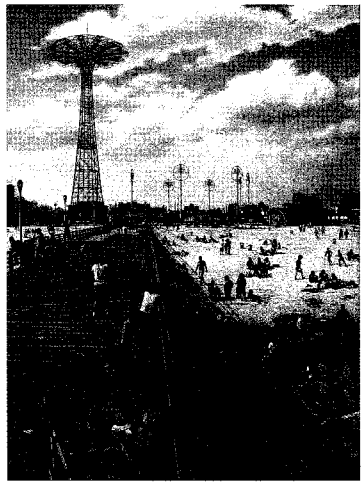
Editor-at-Large
Myron Magnet

Contributing Editors
William Andrews
Michael Knox Beran
Theodore Dalrymple
Nicole Gelinas
Victor Davis Hanson
Howard Husock
Kay S. Hymowitz
Stefan Kanfer
Andrew Klavan
John Leo
Heather Mac Donald
Judith Miller
Peter Reinharz
Fred Siegel
Guy Sorman
Harry Stein
Sol Stern
William J. Stern

Art Director
Jerome Rufino

Picture Editor
Karen Marston

Publication Committee
Brian C. Anderson, William J. Bennett, Eugene D. Brody, Charles H. Brunie, Anthony P. Coles, Andrew J. Cowin, Michael J. Fedak, Peter M. Flanigan, Roger Hertog, Steven Klinsky, Myron Magnet, Lawrence J. Mone, Peggy Noonan, James Piereson, Robert Rosenkranz, Nathan E. Saint-Amand, Paul E. Singer, Thomas J. Tisch, Dietrich Weismann, Byron Wien



On the cover: Doug Safranek's *Overcast* (egg tempera on panel, 2007–08). Safranek's works have been featured in solo exhibitions in New York, Washington, and Wisconsin, and his paintings are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Little Rock's Arkansas Art Center, and Seattle's Frye Art Museum, among others. He is represented in New York City by ACA Galleries: www.acagalleries.com. Courtesy of ACA Galleries and the artist.

City Journal (ISSN 1060-8540) is published four times a year by the Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Telephone: (212) 599-7000. Fax: (212) 599-0371. E-mail: letters@city-journal.org. Subscription rates: one year: $23; two years: $42; foreign subscriptions subject to $8-per-year postage surcharge; back issues: $8 (ten or more, $7 each); reprints: $3. Distributed in the United States by Hudson News Company, 1305 Paterson Plank Road, North Bergen, NJ 07047, (201) 867-3600; Ingram Periodicals, 18 Ingram Boulevard, La Vergne, TN 37086, (615) 793-5522; Ubiquity Distributors, 607 DeGraw Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217, (718) 875-5491.

Please visit our regularly updated website at www.city-journal.org.

Signed articles express the views of their authors and are intended solely to inform and broaden public debate. They are not intended to aid or hinder legislation before legislative bodies at the municipal, state, or federal level.
© 2008 by the Manhattan Institute, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

Michael Knox Beran 14 **Obama, Shaman**
The candidate's post-masculine charisma tempts America in the age of Oprah.

Heather Mac Donald 22 **The NYPD Diaspora**
Former New York cops bring cutting-edge, effective policing to beleaguered communities.

Guy Sorman 32 **Economics Does Not Lie**
The dismal science is at last a *science*—and the world is the beneficiary.

Myron Magnet 42 **The Great African-American Awakening**
Some brave voices are shifting the conversation from victimhood to responsibility.

Steven Malanga 54 **The Professional Panhandling Plague**
A new generation of shakedown artists hampers America's urban revival.

Edward L. Glaeser 62 **Houston, New York Has a Problem**
The southern city welcomes the middle class; heavily regulated and expensive Gotham drives it away.

Nicole Gelinas 69 **New York's Next Fiscal Crisis**
Mayor Bloomberg needs to prepare the city for the crash of the Wall Street gravy train.

Sol Stern 78 **A Marshall Plan for Reading**
How New York schools can close the racial achievement gap

Harry Stein 84 **The Future of Conservative Books**
As mainstream publishers' flirtation with the Right cools, smaller houses are stepping in.

Paul Howard 93 **Health Care's New Entrepreneurs**
Innovators are bringing consumer-oriented medicine to market, with promising results.

Urbanities

Jerry Weinberger 102 **Benjamin Franklin: City Slicker**
The self-styled country mouse was in truth America's first great urbanist.

Stefan Kanfer 110 **In Living Black-and-White**
The old classics retain a vitality and beauty that color can't provide.

Departments

5 **In Prospect**

6 **Soundings**
Braggistan in the America of the Imagination; Intelligent Policing Comes to New Jersey; . . . and other matters.

Theodore Dalrymple 120 **Oh, to be in England**
Childhood's End

125 **Letters**

127 **Contributors**

John Renehan 128 **New York City Diarist**
I Am Not Having a Crisis

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How is it possible for a quarterly magazine to seem the most timely publication in the country?"
—Scott Johnson, Power Line

Here's how.

From recent issues:

Brian C. Anderson The Plot to Shush Rush and O'Reilly | Bruce Bawer Creeping Sharia | Michael Knox Beran Paternalist Africrats | Theodore Dalrymple What the New Atheists Don't See | Nicole Gelinas Baghdad on the Bayou | Edward L. Glaeser Can Buffalo Ever Come Back? | André Glucksmann From the H-Bomb to the Human Bomb | Victor Davis Hanson Why We Should Study War | Christopher Hitchens An Anglosphere Future | Kay S. Hymowitz The New Girl Order | Stefan Kanfer The Magnificent Silver Screen | Andrew Klavan The Lost Art of War | Heather Mac Donald Reclaiming Skid Row | Myron Magnet The Great African-American Awakening | Steven Malanga The Kind of Immigration We Need | Judith Miller Policing Terror | Guy Sorman China's Empire of Lies | Harry Stein The Future of Conservative Books | Sol Stern School Choice Is Not Enough

CITY

Subscribe to *City Journal* for $23 per year
(four issues)—a 10 percent savings off the newsstand price.
(800) 562-1973
www.city-journal.org/subscribe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Prospect

There's much to be glum about these days: the mortgage meltdown, stratospheric gas prices, a resurgent American Left. But this issue of *City Journal* brings some remarkably good news—signs of progress, to use a resonant word that has fallen out of use.

First, in law enforcement. Everybody knows about New York's amazing crime turnaround during the nineties under Mayor Rudy Giuliani and his first police chief, William Bratton. But far fewer people know about what Heather Mac Donald calls the "NYPD Diaspora." Since the late nineties, she reports on page 22, an unprecedented migration of NYPD commanders has left the force to take up top-cop positions elsewhere. Mac Donald focuses most intently on East Orange, New Jersey, which had a per-capita crime rate 14 times New York's when José Cordero arrived in 2004 to direct its police department. Just three years later, after Cordero implemented NYPD-style reforms, major felonies had dropped nearly 70 percent—possibly the greatest crime-fighting success story in American history. And as Mac Donald shows, East Orange is only one of many communities made newly safe by smart policing. Her essay should shake up criminologists, who keep trying to explain crime drops by anything *but* policing reforms. (Some liberal cities, facing the "Professional Panhandling Plague" described by Steven Malanga on page 54, should take heed, too: urban prosperity requires safe, orderly streets, free from aggressive begging.)

A second area where progress is real is in the discipline of economics. No longer do hazy intuition and political ideology have a major influence on economic thought, argues Guy Sorman in the paradigm-shifting "Economics Does Not Lie" (page 32). Over the last few decades, he observes, the dismal science has undergone a scientific revolution, so that almost all mainstream economists now embrace the key tenets of market capitalism—for instance, that free trade encourages development, that markets are the most efficient means of allocating scarce resources, and that monetary stability is essential to growth. Milton Friedman, in other words, has defeated Marx and Keynes in the war of ideas. This new consensus, as yet dimly understood by the public, has largely guided global economic policies in recent years—with awe-inspiring results, including the peaceful reconstruction of Eastern Europe and the lifting of hundreds of millions of Indians and Chinese out of poverty.

Yet good policies aren't guaranteed to continue, warns Sorman: the free market retains a multitude of enemies, ranging from terror masters who dream of a new caliphate to various constituencies that simply want to defend their own material interests against market competition. And economic mismanagement hasn't vanished, either, as Nicole Gelinas shows in "New York's Next Fiscal Crisis" (page 69). Mayor Michael Bloomberg ratcheted up spending during his administration as if Wall Street's long boom, which filled the city's coffers, would never end, Gelinas notes. Thanks to the profligacy, the market's recent woes may have a devastating long-term impact on the city.

A third mark of progress charted in this issue of *City Journal* is the honest and painful discussion that America's blacks have opened—with themselves and with other Americans—on family breakdown, crime, and educational failure in the African-American community. Spurred by leading African-Americans like Bill Cosby and Juan Williams, this movement refuses to blame the broader society, rich with opportunity, for the ongoing struggles of blacks; it may be the most hopeful development in race relations in years, says Myron Magnet (page 42).

Many Americans believe that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama offers a new politics of progress and hope. Our lead story (page 14), a tour de force of historical and political analysis by Michael Knox Beran, sees in that politics something far darker: a disturbing mix of irrational charisma and communitarian utopianism at odds with the realistic vision of America's Founding Fathers, one of the most compelling and urbane of whom is the subject of Jerry Weinberger's lovely essay on page 102, "Benjamin Franklin: City Slicker."

—Brian C. Anderson

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Soundings

Braggistan in the America of the Imagination

Why the military loses the information war

Before my friend, Army major Rory Aylward, left for Afghanistan at the end of February, he invited me down to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to watch the final stage of his training. The "Capstone exercises" were to be a week of staged maneuvers set in "FOB Patriot," an imaginary Forward Operating Base in Central Asia. "Theater immersion," the Army calls it. The soldiers, sailors, and airmen involved refer to it mordantly as Braggistan.

I was eager to attend. I had just finished an essay for *City Journal* on the latest spate of Hollywood antiwar films (see "The Lost Art of War," Winter 2008). I was appalled by them and, as an occasional screenwriter myself, ashamed of the industry. The movie business has produced and is still producing a steady stream of petulant, we-are-the-enemy propaganda pieces—including *Redacted*, *Lions for Lambs*, and *In the Valley of Elah*—that portray those who wear the "uniforms that guard you while you sleep" as brutal abusers, naive cannon fodder, or shell-shocked and murderous maniacs. I wanted to go to Braggistan to pay tribute to Rory and his colleagues and to let them know that there are still some people in the entertainment world grateful to them for keeping our artsy carcasses safe from the madcap slaves of Allah.

Plus, it sounded as though it might be fun—which it was, kind of.

Rory is part of a PRT, or Provincial Reconstruction Team, made up of about 90 active and reservist servicemen, as well as a few civilians. They're being deployed in Afghanistan to try to help build a civil society there in the after-wreckage of the Taliban. This culminating week of training, under the auspices of the 189th Brigade of the First Army Division East, consisted of improvisational role playing: unscripted meetings between PRT officers and actors doing their best impersonations of local mullahs.

It was nothing if not amusing to watch the team's leader, Commander George Perez—a highly intelligent but plainspoken Navy submariner who looked as though he'd be more comfortable solving his problems with a torpedo—try to master the art of sensitive intercultural negotiations (for which, it turned out, he had a genuine talent). More amusing still, training planners often interrupted the scenarios with unannounced "injects"—simulated sudden dangers meant to represent the perils of the real Afghanistan. Thus I found myself bouncing over muddy forest roads in Humvees with fake IEDs exploding on every side; dodging mock sniper fire in cinderblock-and-plywood villages; and running here and there in "full battle rattle"—some 40 pounds of body armor—which, for a man my age, had a certain hernial hilarity all its own.

But jolly as all this may be when the bullets aren't real, I found something truly disconcerting about making the transition from Hollywood to FOB Patriot—I mean, from one exercise in make-believe to another. I couldn't help noticing that we—we of the cultural classes—do make-believe better than the people who live and fight in the real world.

I kept thinking back to all those antimilitary movies I'd seen and to left-wing journals like the *New York Times*, which consistently highlight military abuses and failures while obscuring and downplaying military heroism and advances. The servicemen I was training with were clearly smart, expert, and committed to excellence in the defense of their country. They also seemed a lot more mentally stable than most of the screenwriters, journalists, and academics I know, though that's not saying much. Yet Hollywood and our left-wing media, as well as our antimilitary professoriate, can be quite convincing when, say, they portray an isolated injustice like Abu Ghraib as evidence of systemic atrocity, or depict veterans as more likely to commit crimes than the rest of us, which statistically they're not. Conversely, as spectacular as our armed forces are at the business of ousting real-life tyrants, they fall a little short when it comes to works of the imagination.

Take Braggistan itself. The trainees, especially those who'd actually been to the wars, complained bitterly about the lack of realism there, crowding around my Humvee at one point to tick off their grievances. The injects—IEDs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and snipers—were more typical of Iraq than Afghanistan, they said, where you're more likely to encounter rocket fire from a distance. The vehicles, equipment, and accommodations weren't true to life. And a lot of the instructors had never been "downrange" and so were teaching out of textbooks rather than from experience. This is not to suggest that the warriors were poorly trained. In fact, they'd been so well trained elsewhere that a fun-park ride like the Capstone exercises struck many of them as irrelevant. After one series of snafus turned a mock *shura*, or tribal consultation, into a gunfight, a passing sergeant shrugged deadpan and drawled to me, "We're better when it's live."

Okay, so the Army isn't Universal Studios. But the failures here are symptomatic of a larger imaginative deficit. From its tongue-tied commander in chief to its "information operations"—which even the military admits are regularly outdone by al-Qaida propagandists—down to the public-affairs people who deal with the local press, the military has so far been incapable of putting its urgent mission into narrative form. An insulated culture of taciturn heroism may work against them here, but there's also the usual governmental cluelessness about dealing with the public. Even at Fort Bragg, when a sympathetic journalist—namely me—tried to get permission to join the training, I was at first given the sort of stone-faced runaround you usually associate with the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Now you may say that capturing the imagination isn't the job of our fighting forces. But this is America, remember: we're a country of the imagination, a living state of mind. We're not connected to one another by bloodlines or any depth of native memory. We're the descendants of an idea that every generation has to learn to hold in its collective consciousness. More than in any other country, it matters in America who we think we are and what we believe we're doing.

Our academies, the news media that train in the academies, and the entertainment industry that's informed by the news media have become, to my thinking, a sort of alternative state of the imagination, a kingdom of lies founded in the muck of hysterical guilt, historical distortion, and philosophical solipsism. In their fantastic

CONEY ISLAND (3)/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

and labyrinthine narrative, our fascist foes are Nemesis, the emanation of our own sins, and therefore our military can only be the mad or foolish servants of evil.

The real story is simpler, and it should be simple enough to tell: we're up against another generation of the ever-present enemies of the American idea, and they have to be stopped by the sort of men and women who are training at Fort Bragg.

—Andrew Klavan

Intelligent Policing Comes to New Jersey

A state revolution in tracing guns, mapping crimes, and sharing information

It was late March 2006, and Governor Jon Corzine was frustrated. Within 48 hours, there had been seven separate shootings in Trenton, the state's capital and home to 85,000 people, including several thousand gang members. In one of several shootouts between warring gangs, a stray .45 caliber round had blown seven-year-old Tajahnique Lee off her bicycle and ripped through her jaw. Tajahnique was alive, but photos of her angelic young face

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blanketed newspapers and TV screens. Violent crime was increasing in New Jersey, even though overall crime had been declining for five years. "How can we stop this violence?" the governor asked his police superintendent, Colonel Joseph R. Fuentes.

Fuentes thought he might have a solution. Back in 2005, he had sent Major Christopher Andreychak, one of his most experienced deputies, to Newark to stop a spike in gun- and gang-related violence there. Andreychak had decided to focus not just on homicides but also on violence that didn't result in murder. "The clearance rate for a homicide—getting someone in handcuffs—was about 65 percent," says Andreychak, a 25-year veteran. "But for aggravated assaults with a firearm that did not result in a homicide, it was 15 percent." Knowing that many of the same culprits were responsible for both types of crime, Andreychak had stressed the need to trace the weapons used in *any* violent assault. In less than a year, the clearance rate for violent incidents in the Newark area had increased from 15 percent to almost 50 percent, and shootings dropped by about 30 percent.

So Fuentes suggested expanding the Newark project to the state's 14 most crime-ridden cities, Corzine allocated $750,000, and what came to be called Project Watchtower was born. At its center is the new Regional Operations Intelligence Center, known as the Rock, a state-of-the art "fusion center" for investigations and emergency management that opened near Trenton in early 2007 and is now manned by some 200 people. Among them are the state's 40 crime analysts—including a group of mostly young women informally known as "Chris's Angels"—who collect and analyze computer data to spot crime trends and patterns, especially those involving gangs and illegal guns. In fact, New Jersey is the first state in the nation to begin tracing the source of all guns used in any crime.

But that's easier said than done. Until this year, analysts say, the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which collected information about guns used in crimes, would pass the information back to cities only if they specifically requested it. The same gun might well have been used in crimes in two neighboring cities, says Fuentes, but neither city's police department would know about it because Washington couldn't tell them—thanks to legislation sponsored by Todd Tiahrt, a Kansas Republican close to the National Rifle Association—and because the cities themselves were barred from sharing the information that they had received.

To deal with the problem, New Jersey police departments now make electronic requests for gun information through the Rock so that federal data about a gun's origins and purchaser flow back to the fusion center. One of Project Watchtower's key components, "N.J. Trace," then analyzes and compares those federal data with crime-gun data reported by New Jersey cities, say analysts Kristen Musolf and Stacy Cavaleiro. One of the federal computer systems can trace shell casings or bullets recovered at different crime scenes back to the same gun; another reveals whether a gun seized at a crime scene has been stolen. Further, this year, Attorney General Anne Milgram ordered all of New Jersey's almost 500 police departments to report information about guns seized at crime scenes to both the Rock and the federal ATF. As a result, the quantity of crime-gun data has increased significantly. In 2006, only 3,600 guns were traced, Andreychak says; in one month alone this summer, about 1,000 guns were traced.

The data-sharing arrangement has already paid off. In late May, Milgram's office brought its first indictments based on information from N.J. Trace, charging five men with illegally selling guns in Trenton after buying them in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, directly across the Delaware River. (Such people, who are legally authorized to buy weapons but who illegally sell them to those lacking such privileges, are called "straw purchasers.") N.J. Trace is "a great law enforcement tool," says Bryan Miller, who heads Ceasefire NJ, an anti-gun-violence group. "Enabling jurisdictions to compare information across borders is a tremendous plus in cutting into the illegal gun market."

Another component of Project Watchtower for increasing prompt crime-data sharing among New Jersey towns is called "N.J. POP" (short for "pins on paper," the way departments have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traditionally mapped crimes). At present, no one knows how many murders and shootings occur in New Jersey each day because the state has no mechanism for collecting, collating, and analyzing such data. Uniform Crime Reporting data from the federal government, which New Jersey and many other states rely on, are a year old when published. To give real-time data to those devising anticrime strategies, Milgram is ordering all of the state's police departments to supply crime data to the Rock promptly. In return, analysts will eventually provide them with daily, weekly, and monthly assessments of gun and gang violence and other crime patterns. "If the more than 500 law enforcement agencies in New Jersey can work together on guns, shootings, and gangs, Watchtower would be a distinctive and potentially powerful weapon in the fight against crime," says Jerry Ratcliffe, an expert at Temple University and an advocate of intelligence-led policing.

The rollout has not been problem-free. Software glitches in the computer programs designed by the Rock's technicians have slowed it, and it hasn't been easy to get New Jersey's 18,000 police officers and 3,000 state troopers to enter crime data into their computers quickly and accurately. But the revolution in policing is well under way, state officials agree. "For the first time, we'll know in a real-time basis what is happening in our state," says Andreychak. "I don't want to get mushy, but it's kind of neat."

—Judith Miller

Organizer in Chief

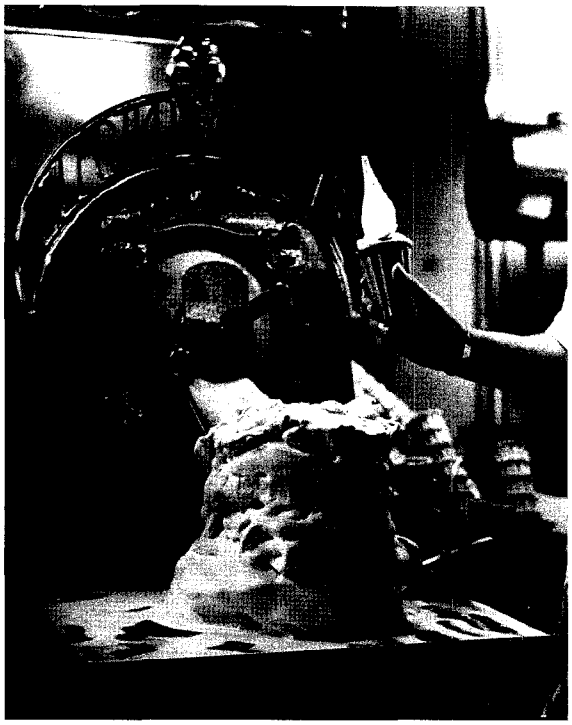
Barack Obama could become our first community-activist president.

Republican presidential candidate John McCain, a war hero turned political leader, has traveled a familiar journey in pursuit of the White House. But his Democratic counterpart, in vaulting from the precincts and wards of American cities into a prominent national role, represents the first appearance in a presidential race of a relatively new political type: the community organizer. Barack Obama's ascendance is a testament to community activists' success in amassing political power since the mid-1960s, when the War on Poverty fueled their rise and changed the electoral calculus in many U.S. cities.

Community organizing's roots stretch back to the 1930s and Chicago organizer Saul Alinsky, founder of the Industrial Areas Foundation and author of *Rules for Radicals*. But it wasn't until President Lyndon Johnson's ambitious plan to end poverty through massive federal spending that the Alinsky model—grassroots organizing, neighborhood by neighborhood—really took off. Starting in the mid-1960s, the federal government directed billions of dollars to neighborhood groups, convinced that they knew better than Washington what their communities needed. The federal funds, eventually supplemented by state and local tax dollars, helped create a universe of government-funded community groups running everything from job-training programs to voter-registration drives—far beyond anything Alinsky could have imagined. Some 3,000 local social-services groups were soon receiving government funding in New York City alone. Many were new, but the money also helped turn traditional charities that had operated on private donations into government contractors.

Those who led these social-services groups became advocates, unsurprisingly, for government-funded solutions to social problems. To defend and expand their turf, organizers began heading into the political arena, wielding the power they had accumulated in neighborhoods to build a base of supporters. In New York, operators of huge social-services groups like Pedro Espada in the Bronx and Albert Vann in Brooklyn won election to state and federal posts after heading up large, powerful nonprofits. By the late 1980s, nearly 20 percent of New York City Council members were products of the government-funded nonprofit sector, and they were among the most strident advocates for higher taxes and more government spending. In other cities, too, from Chicago to Cleveland to Los Angeles, the road to electoral success increasingly ran through the government-funded social-services sector. Spending directed to these groups boomed through both Republican and Democratic administrations. "The non-profit service sector

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



EILEEN DARBY/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

has never been richer, more powerful," former welfare recipient Theresa Funiciello wrote in her 1993 book *Tyranny of Kindness*. "Except to the poor, poverty is a mega-business."

Obama began his organizing life in the mid-1980s in a community group whose progress mirrored that of the rest of the industry: the Developing Communities Project, formed on Chicago's South Side as a "faith-based grassroots organization organizing and advocating for social change." Though founded with resources from a coalition of churches, over time the DCP evolved, like many left-leaning religious organizations, into a government contractor essentially subsisting on tax money—with nearly 80 percent of its revenues deriving from public contracts and grants.

As a young college graduate immersed in the world of tax-bankrolled activism, Obama adopted the big-government ethos that prevailed among neighborhood organizers who viewed attempts to reform poverty programs as attacks on the poor. Speaking to an alternative weekly on the eve of his 1995 run for state senate, Obama said—in language that his wife, Michelle, would echo years later—that "these are mean, cruel times, exemplified by a 'lock 'em up, take no prisoners' mentality that dominates the Republican-led Congress." He derided the "old individualistic bootstrap myth" of American achievement that conservatives were touting. Self-help strategies "have become thinly veiled excuses for cutting back on social programs, which are anathema to a conservative agenda," he wrote in a chapter that he contributed to a 1990 book, *After Alinsky: Community Organizing in Illinois*. (He also depicted leftist community organizing as a harder task than similar efforts by the Christian Right, telling a reporter in 1995 that "it's always easier to organize around intolerance, narrow-mindedness and false nostalgia.")

To maintain that society was fundamentally unjust, Obama had to deny the significance of the black advancement that surrounded him in Chicago. Looking out over the world of local politics in a city that until recently had been governed by a black mayor and had a number of prominent blacks in power, Obama saw only efforts to undermine African-American progress. In 1990, he admitted "black achievement in prominent city positions" but added that it had only "put us in the awkward position of administering underfunded systems neither equipped nor eager to address the needs of the urban poor." Still, Obama opted to head into politics himself, justifying the move as a third way between the limitations of local organizing and the narrow careerism that, he claimed, characterized local black pols. He, by contrast, would become the politician as community organizer.

Yet he wasn't above using the hardball tactics of Chicago politics to jump-start his career. In his first race, he employed knowledge of the electoral system that he had gained from heading up a voter-registration drive to challenge, on technical grounds, the nominating petitions of his Democratic primary opponents. His effort eventually forced all of them off the ballot, including the incumbent Alice Palmer, who had tabbed Obama as her successor until she decided to run again. Observing the irony of someone who once ran an effort designed to expand ballot access now pushing rivals off the ballot, one of Obama's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opponents asked: "Why say you're for a new tomorrow, then do old-style Chicago politics to remove legitimate candidates?"

Obama's legislative achievements as a state senator were not extensive, but his supporters count among his biggest victories his work to expand subsidized health care in Illinois with social-justice groups like United Power for Action and Justice, an offshoot of Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation. Later, when he announced his run for president, Obama visited some of these groups and reminded them of their long struggles together. Meeting last November with the leaders of the Association of Community Organizers for Reform Now (Acorn)—the nationwide network of left-wing community groups that taps government money for a host of causes—Obama declared: "I've been fighting alongside Acorn on issues you care about my entire career," including representing Acorn in a court case in Illinois. Acorn members apparently reciprocated by working hard to turn out voters for Obama's Illinois campaigns, according to a 2003 piece in the magazine *Social Policy* by a Chicago-area Acorn organizer. After the candidate's November appearance, Acorn's affiliated political action committee endorsed Obama for president.

Obama's nomination will be celebrated as a first for African-Americans. But the racial symbolism may obscure the importance of his presidential run to the tens of thousands of government-funded community groups that stand to benefit from an Obama agenda that's right out of the 1960s. His presidential platform touts programs that would refuel the nonprofit sector, ranging from a commitment to boost money for federal relics like the ineffective and wasteful Community Development Block Grant program (see "America's Worst Urban Program," Spring 2005) to a plan for providing "a full network of services, including early childhood education, youth violence prevention efforts and after-school activities . . . from birth to college" to a series of "Promise Neighborhoods."

Obama's genius as a candidate, meanwhile, has not been lost on the community of activists from which he emerged. As a publication of the National Housing Institute, a social-justice group, has observed: "Barack Obama carries lessons he learned as a community organizer to the political arena. Both organizers and politicians would be wise to study them closely."

—*Steven Malanga*

Olympic Crossroads

It's right for Western democracies to put pressure on Beijing.

The approaching Olympic games have highlighted the *aboulia*—the loss of will—that besets Western democracies. Incoherence reigns in confronting the power of former Communists; diplomats have no idea whom they are dealing with, nor the experts what kind of regime they are discussing. The brutal repression of monks and civilians in Tibet shocks world opinion and accelerates our elites' belly dance before the Chinese authorities. To go, or not to go? Many leaders now suddenly discover that their calendars are too busy for them to make it to the games' solemn opening ceremony. Nevertheless, only a few leaders—Polish, Czech, Bulgarian—dare to announce outright that they will boycott this political display coronating a regime that flouts human rights. For the most part, hypocrisy is in the ascendant, and the lame excuses that proliferate in France, anyway, do credit to no one. Faced with the choice of respecting either the Olympic torch or those assassinated and tortured in Lhasa, Parisians have made their decision, whatever the cost for regional or world diplomacy.

Since the fall of the Soviet empire and the opening of China to a market economy, foreign ministries are at a loss. At one moment, they bet on everything going well at the end of history—that is, the end of the history of great conflicts and great challenges—and at the next, they fear a new cold war and don't know where to turn. Yesterday, George W. Bush discerned the clear blue sky in the eyes of Vladimir Putin; today, presidential candidate John McCain, no less Republican, sees only three sinister initials: KGB. Tony Blair anointed Putin even before he was elected; but more recently, after the radioactive assassination of the dissident Alexander Litvinenko in London, he has left 10

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Downing Street at extreme loggerheads with the Kremlin. Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, publicly friendly with Putin, has sworn to me that he was more critical with him in private. A similar display of dillydallying is shaping up around a China that the West both courts and fears. The emerging third power of the world—with 1.3 billion inhabitants—exerts a power of fascination, for better or for worse.

The gigantic, even pharaonic, public works that are transforming Beijing into an Olympic capital stun and overwhelm us. Three decades after burying the Marxist economic model, China is celebrating its amazing transformation. As in the cases of Japan and Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, the modernization and globalization of the country are advancing chaotically and at very high speed. The unprecedented rapidity of modern industrial and financial techniques, combined with the inhuman brutality characteristic of the great workshops of yesterday's Communism, produces an economic miracle, broadcast to the world.

While admiring the skyscrapers that rise up almost instantly, one forgets the millions of exhausted, emaciated peasants tasked with renovating the capital, where they rot until being sent away once the great work is done. "Pharaonic" describes not only the construction but the whole social structure of the world's largest country. At the summit rules the collective pharaoh, the Chinese Communist Party, whose leading clans settle their affairs sheltered from public scrutiny. At the bottom, there are a billion workers and peasants deprived of elementary rights, a population of modern serfs and slaves. (The extent of the Chinese countryside's poverty was revealed in May's devastating earthquake, situated in Szechuan province; schools collapsed onto children, terrible testimony of bureaucratic corruption and of the Party's negligence in the absence of organized opposition and free expression.) Between the two lies a rapidly expanding middle class that benefits from a new and fragile prosperity and that tends, with a few admirable exceptions, more toward political docility than toward claiming fundamental "bourgeois" rights.

Modernization, yes; democratization, no! This is the guiding principle of the Chinese pharaoh, established in 1989 by the bloody repression in Tiananmen Square, including the execution, torture, or deportation of thousands of students. This is the answer to every act of dissent, whether by foolhardy strikers, peasants in revolt, dissident intellectuals, careless Web surfers, or the monks of Tibet. China is no longer a totalitarian state in the Stalinist or Maoist sense of the term, but a postmodern, de-ideologized dictatorship: there are almost 10,000 executions per year, we are told—and families must reimburse the state for the cost of the bullets put in their loved ones' heads. The elite no longer worships at the shrine of doctrinaire illusions; it prefers to seek riches and to hold on to power. It accepts the market and globalization without allowing the accountability, the checks on power, and the requirement of transparency characteristic of liberal democracies. Economic miracles do not automatically engender democratic miracles, nor do they provide a guarantee against a turn toward chauvinism and militarism. The examples of Japan and Germany between 1900 and 1940 are available to refresh the memories of forgetful diplomats. The great nation of China finds itself at a crossroads, and all the fawning is not helpful to it.

A half-century of Communist catastrophes, both suffered and inflicted, has left the hard core in Beijing ultra-cynical, unscrupulous, insensitive to good or evil; they have little regard for their countrymen's freedom of expression or for the noble sentiments with which their Western interlocutors embellish their requests for better behavior. Enough, then, with false naivety; our necessary coexistence with the giant of Asia should be based neither on contempt nor on indulgent complacency. Postmodern dictatorships understand only the quid pro quo. There is no reason to grant this one the award of a world-historical opening ceremony in Beijing as long as Lhasa is suffering behind closed doors. Politicians: if there are no serious changes between now and then, boycott the very political opening of the Olympic games and find the courage, the lucidity, and the dignity to explain why. Proof that the Chinese leaders are not insensitive to pressure is that, faced with foreign protests, they have begun to change their vocabulary: whereas

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not long ago, they were denouncing the plots of the Dalai Lama's circle, now they have sought to receive its representatives. Is this merely a gesture to salve the bad conscience of diplomats? Or is it a first step? Nineteen years after the Tiananmen massacre, partisans of freedom and human rights are growing impatient.

—*André Glucksmann*

Construction Safety Woes

More building shouldn't mean more deaths.

BYRON COLLECTION/MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK/GETTY IMAGES

Nine people died in two Manhattan crane collapses this spring. But what's the fatality rate? Neither the press nor Mayor Michael Bloomberg has offered helpful data to help answer that question. Bloomberg says that "construction is a dangerous business and you will always have fatalities"—not a signal that he's demanding huge decreases. The media keep mentioning that we're in a building boom, as if the death rate should stay constant or go up as construction activity increases.

The opposite is true. The more we do something, the better we should get at it, thanks to technology, regulation, and experience. More Americans spend more time in cars than in the mid-sixties, but the death rate per miles traveled has fallen by three-quarters. Airline activity has hit record levels, yet flying has never been safer.

But in construction, New York hasn't made strides in getting the death rate down over the past decade, even though the experience we've gained should have helped. While data on individual years are subject to big swings, the city averaged 24.6 yearly deaths per 100,000 construction workers from 1998 through 2000, and 27.2 from 2004 through 2006 (the last year for which complete data are available). At the national level, the rate was lower and falling: 18.1 from 1998 through 2000, and 16.7 from 2004 through 2006. New York doesn't seem interested in the construction-worker death rate, though; its Department of Buildings doesn't include it in the mayor's management report.

While construction may be "dangerous," most construction deaths are preventable. In 2006, more than half of them were from falls, often because workers weren't following basic rules. If a worksite contractor isn't insisting on safety, it's likely that he's also flouting less serious rules—starting work too early in the morning, say. Since neighbors often report such infractions to the city, it wouldn't be hard to use those complaints to step up surveillance on the worst culprits. Another important step is imposing rational, predictable penalties for all violation levels that would cost developers time and money.

Of course, some incidents are harder to predict and prevent. But one thing is clear, according to Barry LePatner, author of *Broken Buildings, Busted Budgets*: at the peak of a boom, developers demand faster work from inexperienced subcontractors and supervisors. So the Department of Buildings' inspectors should increase the rate of surveillance and enforcement as construction increases, not struggle to keep up.

But such efforts are worthless unless the city roots out corruption in the department. An honest inspection—whether it's of noise violations or the adequacy of training—could mean the difference between life and death. After the two crane crashes, investigators charged one crane inspector with taking bribes and arrested another for allegedly fabricating a report claiming (falsely) that he had visited the first construction site before the collapse. It's still too easy to find an alleged liar or cheat after each construction disaster. If Bloomberg has made strides here, the results don't show.

—*Nicole Gelinas*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Obama, Shaman

The candidate's post-masculine charisma tempts America in the age of Oprah.

Michael Knox Beran

In the patois of punditry, "charismatic" has come to mean little more than "like a rock star." But the striking thing about the charismatic leader is the extent to which his followers regard him as a healer of wounds, an alleviator of pain. In this sense, surely, Senator Barack Obama *is* charismatic. The carefully knotted ties and the dark, conservatively tailored suits only accentuate the exoticness of his shamanism; he has entered the American psyche not as a hero but as a healer.

The country, or much of it, has longed for such a figure, a man from the once-oppressed race whose rise to power will atone for the sins of slavery and racial stigmatization. But Obama's rhetoric encompasses more than a promise of racial healing. He is not the first politician to argue that politics can redeem us, but in posing as the Adonis who will turn winter into spring, he revives one of the more pernicious political swindles: the belief that a charismatic leader can ordain a civic happy hour and give a people a sense of community that will make them feel less bad.

In his unfinished treatise *Economy and Society*, Max Weber defined charisma as "a certain quality in an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." Weber was able to do little more, before he died in 1920, than give a pseudoscientific élan to an idea that had been kicking around for centuries. Most of what he said about charismatic authority was stated more cogently in Book III of Aristotle's *Politics*, which described the great-souled man who "may truly be deemed a God among men" and who, by virtue of his greatness, is exempt from ordinary laws.

What both Aristotle and Weber made too little of is the mentality of the charismatic leader's followers, the disciples who discover in him, or delusively endow him with, superhuman qualities. "Charisma" was originally a religious term signifying a gift of God: it often denotes (according to the seventeenth-century scholar-physician John Bulwer) a "miraculous gift of healing." James G. Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, demonstrated that the connection between charismatic leadership and the melioration of suffering was historically a close one: many primitive peoples believed that the magical virtues of a priest-king could guarantee the soil's fertility and that such a leader could therefore alleviate one of the most elementary forms of suffering, hunger. The identification of leadership with the mitigation of pain persists in folklore and myth. In the Arthurian legends, Percival possesses an extraordinary magic that enables him to heal the fisher king and redeem the waste land; in England, the touch of the monarch's hand was believed to cure scrofula.

Illustrations by Arnold Roth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is a sign of growing maturity in a people when, laying aside these beliefs, it acknowledges that suffering is an element of life that sympathetic magic cannot eradicate, and recognizes a residue of pain in existence that even the application of technical knowledge cannot assuage. Advances in knowledge may end particular kinds of suffering, but these give way to new forms of hurt—milder, perhaps (one would rather be depressed than famished), yet not without their sting. We do not draw closer to a painless world.

One of the objects of a mature political philosophy is to reconcile people to the painful limitations of their condition. The American Founders recognized this, as did the English statesmen who presided at the Revolution of 1688: they rejected utopianism. And yet, precisely because they knew that human beings are by nature far from perfect, they allowed a degree of scope, in their constitutional settlements, for the mysterious, quasi-magical qualities that Weber associated with charisma—rather as an architect, as a concession to human frailty, might omit the number 13 when labeling the floors of a building. The "magic" of the post-1688 English constitution, Walter Bagehot observed, lay in the pageantry of the monarchy, a relic of the mysterious grace of the healer-redeemer chiefs of old. The American Founders, after experimenting with weaker forms of executive power, created the presidency, an office spacious enough for a charismatic leader to work his wizardry but narrow enough to prevent delusory overreaching.

Unlike the English Whigs and the American Founders, the modern liberal regards suffering not as an unavoidable element of life but as an aberration to be corrected by up-to-date political, economic, and hygienic arrangements. Rather than acknowledge the limitations of our condition, the liberal continually contrives panaceas that will enable us to transcend it.

Barack Obama, in taking up the part of regenerative healer, is the latest panacea. As a society, Obama says, we are hurting. Our schools are "crumbling." There are "lines in the emergency rooms" of the hospitals, and our corporate culture is "rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed." He points to the millions of Americans who, in struggling with life's difficulties ("high gas bills, insufficient health insurance, and a pension that some bankruptcy court somewhere has rendered unenforceable"), have become bitter and unhappy. Obama finds a scapegoat for the present discontents in politics—a politics, he argues, that breeds "division, and conflict, and cynicism" and that has become a "dead zone" in which "narrow interests vie for advantage and ideological minorities seek to impose their own versions of absolute truth."

The solution, he says, lies in a political reformation. Unless we "begin the process of changing politics and our civic life," we will bequeath to our children "a weaker and more fractured America" than the one we inherited. Hence his mantra, "Change we can believe in." Like the Nicene Creed, Obama's doctrine begins in belief. *Credo*. Once we *believe* in the possibility of a transformative politics, "the perfection begins." The selfish politics of the present yields to the selfless politics of the future. We discover that "this nation is more than the sum of its parts—that out of many, we are truly one." So believing, we can replace a politics that breeds division, conflict, and cynicism with a politics that fosters unity and peace. In Obama's "project of national renewal," government can become an expression of "our communal values, our sense of mutual responsibility and social solidarity."

Even as Obama suggests that a new communitarianism can heal America's pain and change American lives, radically and for the better, he is careful to anticipate the charge of utopian delusion. Government, he tells people, cannot "solve all their problems." But presumably it can solve most of them.

The danger of Obama's charismatic healer-redeemer fable lies in the hubris it encourages, the belief that gifted politicians can engender a selfless communitarian solidarity. Such a renovation of our national life would require not only a change in constitutional structure—the current system having been geared to conflict by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Founders, who believed that the clash of private interests helps preserve liberty—but also a change in human nature. Obama's conviction that it is possible to create a beautiful politics, one in which Americans will selflessly pursue a shared vision of the common good, recalls the belief that Dostoyevsky attributed to the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionists: that, come the revolution, "all men will become righteous in one instant." The perfection would begin.

In rejecting the Anglo-American politics of limits, Obama revives a political tradition that derives ultimately from Niccolò Machiavelli. In the *Discourses on Livy* and *The Art of War*, Machiavelli argued that it is possible to create a communitarian republic like the one whose outlines he glimpsed in Livy's (highly romanticized) version of Roman history—a polity in which citizens, forsaking their own swinish pursuits, would become happy in the pursuit of a common good. Wise laws, he maintained, would "make citizens love one another." The virtuous *res publica* of the Romans could be conjured anew.

"Obama revives a style of charismatic leadership that fell out of favor in the United States after the death of FDR."

To liberate a people from the bondage of pain and establish a new communal order, a statesman must possess, Machiavelli argued, a kind of charisma he called *virtù*. He described the most charismatic statesman with whom he was (personally) acquainted, Cesare Borgia, in Weberian terms, as one who "exhibits a fortune unheard of, a *virtù* and confidence [so much] more than human that he can attain all he desires."

Jacob Burckhardt credited the luminaries of the Italian Renaissance with envisioning the state as a work of art. More tragically, they envisioned it as a machinery of redemption. Machiavelli's prince was the first intimation of a modern charismatic type, the demiurge who used a demonic *virtù* to overcome divisive self-seeking in the name of social solidarity. Self-interest led to market capitalism and alienation; civic selflessness led to public-spirited communitarianism and happiness. The "Machiavellian vocabulary," the historian J. G. A. Pocock argued in *The Machiavellian Moment*, became the "vehicle of a basically hostile perception of early modern capitalism." Machiavelli rejected the commercial ethos (predicated on the pursuit of private interest) that the leading Anglo-American statesmen sought to encourage.

In doing so, he anticipated modernity's childish dream of an anodyne world. His communitarian state is the prototype of the workers' paradises of Marx and Lenin and the Nordic Valhallas of Hitler and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. His influence is evident in both the enlightened despot celebrated by the Continental philosophes and the socialist wizard admired by intellectuals like Edmund Wilson, who hailed Marx as a mix of "Prometheus and Lucifer," a heroically diabolic figure who could redeem the waste land of modern capitalism, the forerunner of Lenin and Stalin, Castro and Mao. The Machiavellian ideal of a communitarian paradise haunts, too, the welfare-state philosophy that Bismarck (for his own cynical reasons) promoted when he established the world's first *Wohlfahrtsstaat*, a model for socialists in Germany and welfare-state liberals in England and the United States.

In breathing fresh life into Machiavelli's communitarian daydream, Obama revives a style of charismatic leadership that fell out of favor in the United States after the death of FDR. Of the three presidents since 1945 most often regarded as possessing charismatic qualities, the first, Kennedy, was a tax cutter who questioned liberal utopianism when he said that "life is not fair," and the second, Reagan, sought to curb the hubris of New Deal *étatisme*. The third, Clinton, said that he could feel our pain but retreated from his pledge to heal it when he scrapped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a plan to nationalize medicine. Obama, by contrast, is faithful to the old-style charismatics, whose slogans ("social solidarity," for example) he has taken out of cold storage.

Of course, he would not have gotten far had he simply defrosted the ideas of Henry Wallace and George McGovern. Obama's charisma is tuned to the mood of the moment. The charisma of American political leaders has typically rested on images of unflinching strength and masculine authority: Teddy Roosevelt in the North Dakota Badlands; Kennedy, the naval hero whose sexual prowess was acknowledged even in his Secret Service code name ("Lancer"); Reagan, the man on horseback whom the Secret Service called "Rawhide." Obama's charisma, by contrast, is closer to what critic Camille Paglia has identified with today's television talk-show culture, in which admissions of weakness are offered as proof of empathetic qualities. Talk-show culture is occupied with the question of why we feel so bad, when it is our right under the liberal dispensation to feel eternally good. The man who would succeed in such a culture must appear to sympathize with these obscure hurts; he must take pains, Paglia writes in *Sexual Personae*, to appear an "androgyne, the nurturant male or male mother."

Obama, in gaming this culture, has figured out a new way to bottle old wine. He knows that experience has taught Americans to suspect the masculine healer-redeemer who bears collectivist gifts; no one wants to revive the caudillos of the thirties. Studiously avoiding the tough-hombre style of earlier charismatic figures, he phrases his vision in the tranquilizing accents of Oprah-land. His charisma is grounded in empathy rather than authority, confessional candor rather than muscular strength, metrosexual mildness rather than masculine testosterone. His power of sympathetic insight is said to be uncanny: "Everybody who's dealt with him," columnist David Brooks says, "has a story about a time when they felt Obama profoundly listened to them and understood them." His two books are written in the empathetic-confessional mode that his most prominent benefactress, Oprah, favors; he is her political healer in roughly the same way that Dr. Phil was once her pop-psychology one. The collectivist dream, Obama instinctively understands, is less scary, more sympathetic, when served up by mama (or by mama in drag).

With the triumph of Obama's post-masculine charisma, the patriarchal collectivism of the New Deal has finally given way to a new vision of liberal community, the empathetic mommy-state that Balzac prophesied in *La Comédie humaine*. The leader of the future, Balzac foresaw, would be a man who, like his diabolically charismatic Jacques Collin, possesses a capacity for maternal love. When his protégé Lucien dies, Collin exclaims: "This blow has been more than death to me, but you can't understand what I'm saying . . . . If you're fathers, you're only that and no more. . . . I'm a mother, too!" Collin ends his career as a functionary of the state—and a policeman. The Grand Inquisitor of the future, Balzac intimates, will undertake his inquisitions in the name of matriarchal pity.

Yet if Obama has made redemptive communitarianism attractive in an age of sagging sperm counts, he has done nothing to correct the underlying flaw of the collectivist ideal: its incompatibility with the older morality of limits. The politics of consensus that Obama favors is incompatible with the Founders' adversarial system, which permits those whom he disparages as "ideological minorities" to take stands on principle that, at times, frustrate the national consensus. Obama makes it clear that there is no place, in the politics he advocates, for those "absolutists" who would defy the community. The "ideological core of today's GOP," he writes, is "absolutism, not conservatism," an absolutism driven by those who prize "absolute truth" over "communal values." This commitment to absolute truth, he argues, stands in the way of a politics that can solve our problems and change our lives.

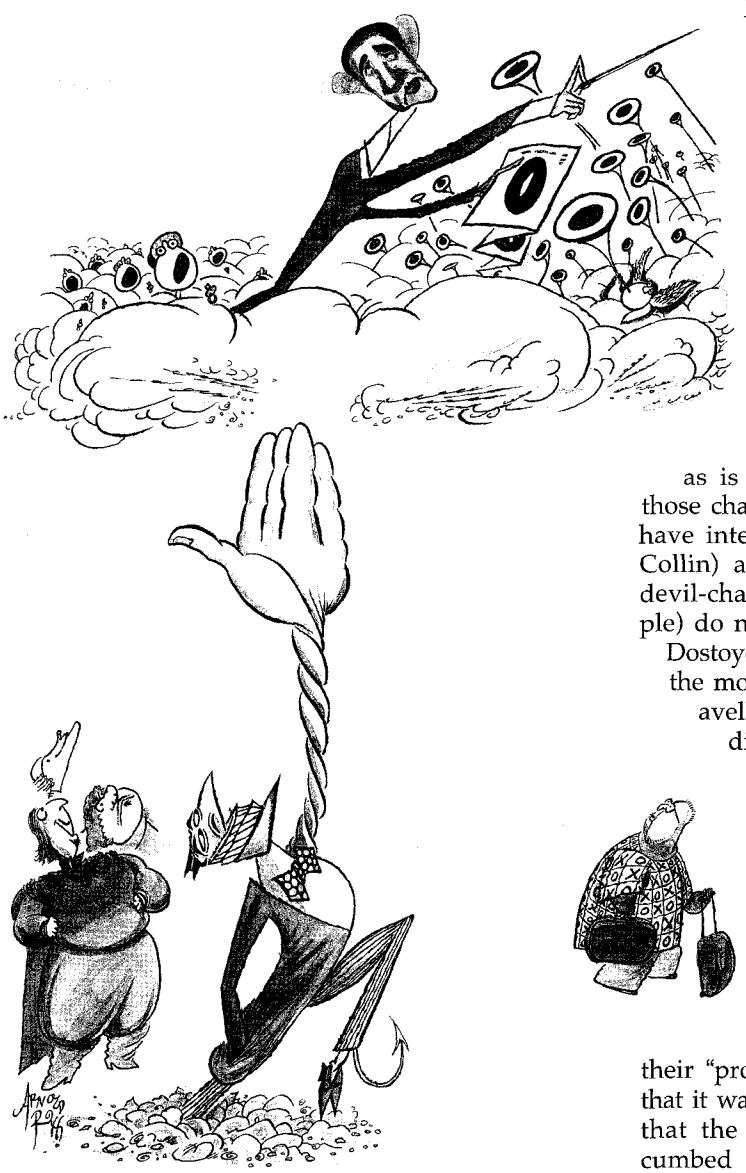
Obama goes so far as to argue that the Constitution itself is "a rejection of absolute truth." His moral relativism is intimately bound up with his conviction that we can transcend those limitations in human nature that the Founders acknowledged when they drafted the Constitution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This rejection of older moral standards, Machiavelli observed, is a tactical necessity for the charismatic redeemer. It is not simply that adherence to the West's traditional morality would prevent such a leader from being properly ruthless in the pursuit of his ideal; it is that the old morality, with its emphasis on the limits of man's fallen condition, makes his communitarian paradise seem quixotic—an instance of utopian overreaching.

Machiavelli was ready with a solution. He helped prepare the way for the politics of redemptive healing by working to overturn the older morality. In particular, he undermined the West's most potent myth of diabolic amorality and delusory hubris. Two years after he completed *The Prince*, Machiavelli composed a fable, *Belfagor, or the Devil Who Took a Wife*, in which he ridiculed the idea that the devil can take possession of a man's mind and corrupt those around him. In assuming (correctly) that the diabolic qualities of his redemptive prince would be easier to swallow once the devil himself became a joke, Machiavelli blazed a path that Voltaire, Diderot, Goethe, and Shaw afterward trod. No one fears the devil that Voltaire refused to renounce on his deathbed. ("This is no time to be making enemies," he jested.) Goethe's Mephistopheles is charming, as is Shaw's (in *Man and Superman*). Even those characters whom modern European artists have intended to be diabolic (such as Balzac's Collin) arouse sympathy in a way that older devil-characters (Shakespeare's Iago, for example) do not.



Dostoyevsky was among the few who grasped the momentousness of the change that Machiavelli initiated in the West's conception of diablerie. Near the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, he describes an encounter between the devil and Ivan Karamazov. The devil appears, not with claws and horns, but in the guise of an elegant man of the world: he phrases his mordant taunts in French and laughs at modern intellectuals who believe that he doesn't exist or who worry that to admit his existence would harm their "progressive image." Dostoyevsky implied that it was precisely when the devil became a wit that the intellectual classes of the West succumbed to the most familiar form of diabolic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

temptation: the belief that men can transcend the limits of their condition and "be as gods"—demiurges with the power to heal the world's pain and reshape it in accordance with a beautiful idea.

Obama has revived a cruel mirage, but the good news is that the country has defenses against his brand of redemptive politics. Some of these defenses are constitutional, others cultural. The very strength of America's religious ideal of redemption has restrained, though it has not entirely forestalled, the development of alternative secular ideals of redemption. A religiously inspired belief in original sin has made Americans wary of succumbing to the Pelagian notion that a mere mortal, however charismatic, can build the New Jerusalem out of purely secular materials. The country's constitutional system, itself founded on the theory of original sin, has created a perpetual conflict of factions and interests that so far has prevented any single party from imposing a monolithic unity from above, such as Europe's collectivists were able to do.

And then there is Old Nick, the West's traditional symbol of evil, who has retained a good deal more apotropaic power on these shores than in Europe. A 1991 survey by the International Social Survey Programme found that 45.4 percent of Americans believed in the devil (61 percent, according to a 2005 Harris poll), compared with 20.4 percent of Italians, 12.5 percent of Russians, 9.5 percent of West Germans, and 3.6 percent of East Germans. We often read about differences between America and Europe with respect to belief in God, but differences with respect to belief in diabolic evil may be even more revealing. It is significant that belief in the devil is lowest in those countries (Russia and Germany) that suffered, during the twentieth century, most acutely from forms of evil that might without exaggeration be called diabolic. Europeans, it may be, have proved more susceptible to the element of diabolic temptation in charismatic leadership precisely because they are less likely to believe in the reality of diabolic evil.

Still, it's hard to deny that Obama has found a weakness in America's defenses. His post-masculine charisma is likely to flourish in a political environment that has come to resemble not only a TV talk show but a TV reality show, in which the candidate rarely escapes the camera's eye. The masculine leader of old had to conceal his weaknesses. "I rather tell thee what is to be feared," Shakespeare has Julius Caesar say, "than what I fear, for always I am Caesar." When scrutiny was less intense, the man on horseback could hope to get away with it. Shakespeare's Cassius laments that the public never knew how weak Caesar really was:

> He had a fever when he was in Spain,
> And when the fit was on him, I did mark
> How he did shake; 'tis true, this god did
> shake . . .

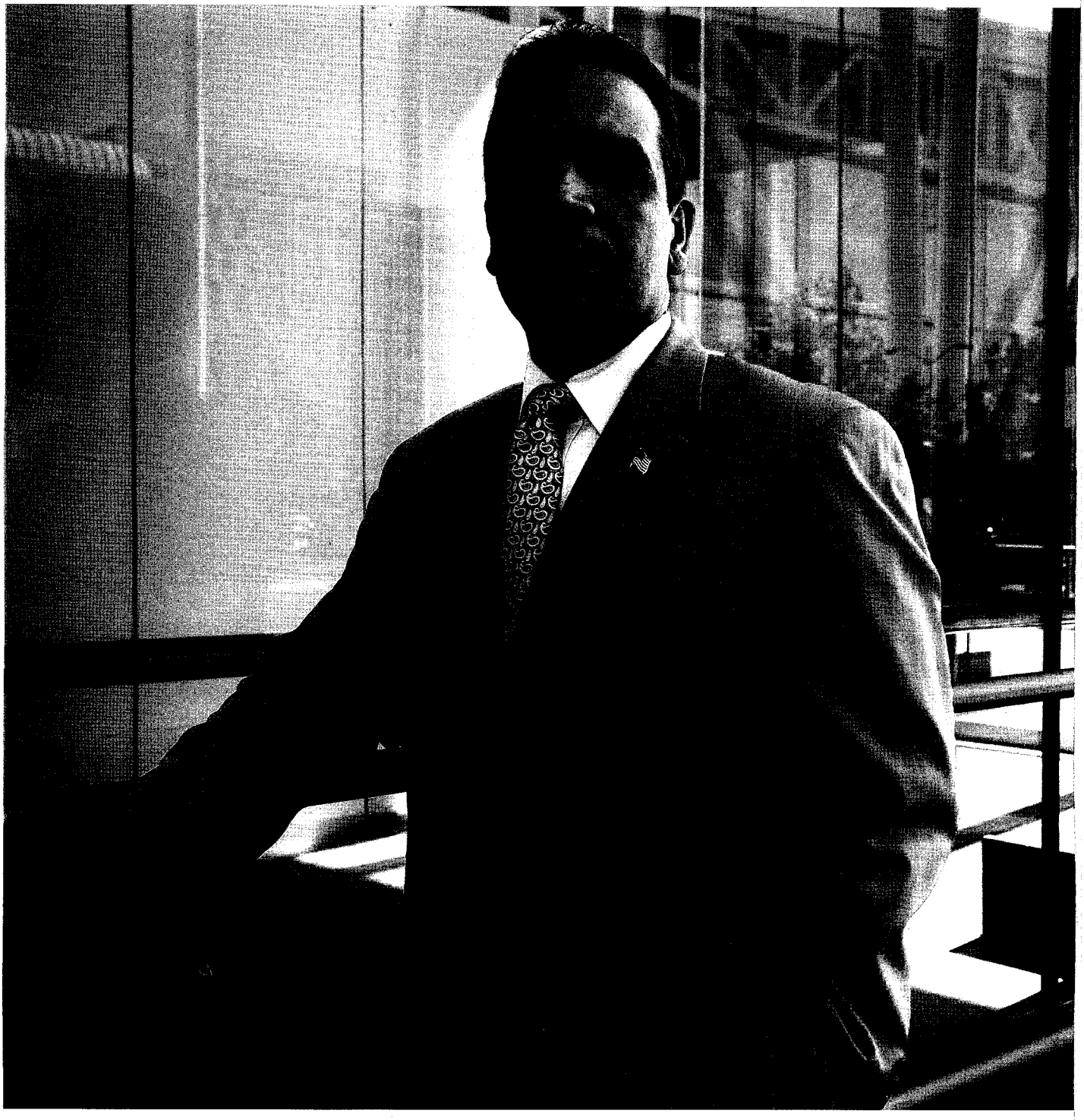
Today a camera would capture the image of the shaking god. Superman, Norman Mailer said in his famous essay on Kennedy, can thrive in the supermarket—but in cable TV and YouTube, the *Übermensch* may finally have met his match.

Meanwhile, the very images of frailty that undermine the masculine leader's pose of strength *help* the practitioner of the new post-masculine charisma, whose object is to appear human—all too human. Softness has become an asset for candidates who have molded themselves on the exhibitionist model of the Oprah matriarchy.

Hence Obama's spectacular rise. But Obamamania is bound in the end to disappoint. Not only does it teach us to despise our political system's wise recognition of human imperfection and the pursuit of private happiness; it encourages us to seek for perfection where we will not find it, in politics, in the hero worship of a charismatic shaman, in the speciousness of a secular millennium. Lacking the moral parables that made our ancestors wary of those delusions in which overweening pride is apt to involve us, we pursue false gods and turn away from traditions that really can help us make sense of our condition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The NYPD Diaspora



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Photographs by Harvey Wang

Former New York cops bring cutting-edge, effective policing to beleaguered communities.

Heather Mac Donald

Since the late 1990s, more than 18 police commanders have left the New York City police department to run their own agencies elsewhere. This unprecedented migration has spread the Compstat revolution—the data-driven transformation of policing begun under New York police commissioner William Bratton in 1994—across the nation. Some of the transplants are well-known: Bratton himself now heads the Los Angeles Police Department; and his former first deputy, John Timoney, has led both the Miami and the Philadelphia forces. But the diaspora also includes lesser-known young Turks who rose quickly through the NYPD's ranks during the paradigm-shattering 1990s. Now, as chiefs in their own right, they're proving the efficacy of analytic, accountable policing in agencies wholly dissimilar from New York's—in one case, achieving success beyond anything seen in Gotham or elsewhere.

José Cordero once led precincts in the Bronx and in Manhattan's Washington Heights, and eventually he served as New York's first city-wide gang strategist. Like other members of the

Taking over the East Orange, New Jersey, police department, José Cordero imported smart management and high-tech tools, . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diaspora, he describes the 1990s NYPD as a life-changing experience: "It was an incredibly resourceful, competitive environment. The wave of captains I was privileged to serve with fed off of each other's experiments." In 2002, he took the helm of the Newton, Massachusetts, police department, bringing crime in that already safe city down to its lowest point in over 30 years.

Then he moved to a very different city. East Orange, New Jersey, has 70,000 citizens by official counts, about 95 percent of them black, and deep pockets of poverty. Crime there—much of it violent—had started skyrocketing in 1999, reaching a per-capita rate in 2003 that was 14 times that of New York City and five times that of Detroit. East Orange's mayor recruited Cordero to quell the violence; Cordero started work in 2004. The results were astonishing. By the end of 2007, major felonies had dropped 68 percent, and homicides 67 percent, from their 2003 high—possibly a national record. (By comparison, from 1993, the year before Bratton arrived in New York City, through 1997, major felonies in New York dropped 41 percent and homicides 60 percent.) East Orange's remarkable experience should give pause to criminologists, who too often ascribe crime drops to anything *but* policing reforms.

If the true test of a leader is his ability to imbue an organization with his vision, Cordero has leadership skills in spades. Intelligence-driven policing, as he calls the Compstat principles, is now in the department's bloodstream, as is the still-iconoclastic belief that the police can actually lower crime. Compstat refers both to the weekly crime-analysis meetings that Bratton pioneered in 1994 to grill precinct leaders about crime on their watch and, more broadly, to the crime-fighting principles that underlay those meetings: relentless gathering of information, constant evaluation of tactics, and a mechanism for holding commanders accountable for public safety. East Orange commanders now focus obsessively on their mission and revel in coming up with new ways to make the city inhospitable to criminals.

The transformation that Cordero effected in the East Orange department mirrored the one he had lived through as a young NYPD captain at the dawn of Compstat. "All we had done up to that point was put people in jail, and it hadn't made a difference," recalls the 52-year-old Bronx native. "The new concept was, know everything you possibly can about crime. What I took away from that period was that by challenging yourself continually to know what you don't know, you can produce big results."

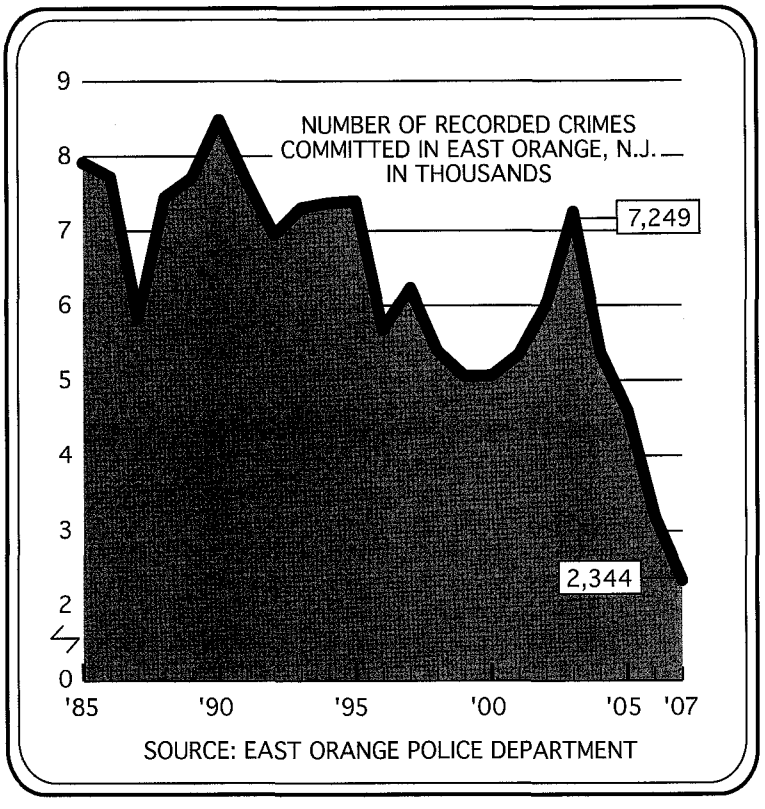
So Cordero tasked his new team to find out everything it could about who was shooting whom. He combined East Orange's gang and narcotics squads to maximize information-sharing between drug and gang detectives, since the narcotics trade and gang violence entwine so closely. Eventually, the department targeted the most violent drug dealers and drove them out of business. Word got out on the street that if you engaged in a shooting, not only were you going to do time—possibly in the federal slammer—but your whole criminal enterprise would be shut down.

Weekly Compstat meetings are at the core of the East Orange crime rout, but Cordero, like his expatriate peers, borrows freely from the entire gamut of crime-busting techniques developed in New York. He put East Orange's two most dangerous streets under 24-hour lockdown for six months while the police bore down on the dealers, a strategy that his NYPD colleague (and now Newark top cop) Garry McCarthy had successfully pioneered in Washington Heights. Today, those two streets are clean and orderly.

Ronald Borgo exemplifies the East Orange Police Department's transformation. He exudes enthusiasm as he sits at a computer terminal, putting the turbocharged crime-analysis computer program that Cordero designed through its paces. "I was ready to move on until I saw what Director Cordero brought on board," says the barrel-chested 27-year veteran of the department, who is soon to be confirmed as chief (a position underneath director). "I'm embarrassed to say that in 2000, we didn't know how to connect the dots. We were just reacting to crime. The director gave us the knowledge and the confidence to actually fight it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

However much Cordero and Borgo stress that it is managerial and philosophical change, not fancy gadgets, that has driven crime down, it's hard not to be wonderstruck by that computer program—"Compstat on steroids," as Cordero calls it. Its "crime dashboard" graphically presents layer upon layer of real-time crime and policing information, updated every 30 seconds. Commanders can check whether any sector of the city is meeting its daily, weekly, and monthly crime-reduction targets, and how the sector's record stacks up against last year's numbers. They can instantly pull up a history of the crimes committed at any location, along with every police response to those crimes, in order to evaluate what strategies have or have not succeeded there in the past. Users can activate the city's public cameras to display crime hot spots.



ALBERTO MENA

. . . producing what may be the greatest crime turnaround in American history.

And most unusually, users can observe how every patrol car is deployed at that moment and what it is doing to prevent crime, in what the department calls "directed patrol." Directed patrol is really nothing more than what good beat cops used to do as a matter of course, before the 911 radio car swallowed their jobs: rather than simply cruising around town waiting for trouble to happen, an officer is supposed to use his time to preempt crimes, ideally by getting out of his car. Cops might walk up a housing project's stairwell to check for drug dealers, say, or pass out flyers about a robbery spree at a mini-mall. "You'd be surprised what people will tell you when you're out of your car that they won't call the department about," says Borgo—such as that a neighboring apartment is likely dealing drugs. Institutionalizing the concept of directed patrol represents a "huge organizational change in how officers work on the street," says Lieutenant Chris Anagnostis. "The new model is: when a cop is not answering a radio call, he should be back in his zone engaged in proactive policing."

The real-time display of patrol activity allows managers to monitor deployment patterns as well as officer initiative. "If a citizen reports a problem, and an officer doesn't see and act on it, then it becomes clear to me that he is not enthusiastic about his job," says Cordero, who dismisses the suggestion that the oversight may feel Orwellian to a street cop. "We're not looking to see if an officer is having a cup of coffee. We're in the business of protecting people; any good cop will see the value of that. For those that don't, I have a word for them: 'Tough. Find another line of work.'"

The patrol-car locator system did produce a backlash. Some officers broke their cars' antennae or yanked out the requisite communication wires.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cordero remained unfazed: "There's 70,000 people I care about; I don't fear disgruntled cops." He seems to have won the battle—officers now treat the vehicle locators as a matter of course. And self-initiated activity has gone way up, reports Borgo. "In 2004, we did 6,389 directed patrols and we thought we were working. In 2007, we did almost half a million," he says. "The technology is one thing, but these cops, my cops, are working. I'm so proud of these cops."

After the department introduced the crime dashboard in 2005, crime plummeted 26 percent in one year. Currently, only supervisors at headquarters and in the field have access to the dashboard, but eventually, every officer on the beat will have a simplified version in his car, so that he can monitor crime in the city in real time and see how his colleagues are responding.

The crime dashboard was just the start of East Orange's technology boom, which has cost about $1.5 million, paid for with federal and state grants and criminal forfeiture money. On the two streets that had been locked down, the department gave residents computer programs enabling them to report suspicious conditions by pointing their mouses at street photos. Community patrol officers have "virtual directed patrol" screens in their cars that let them watch two places simultaneously: they can park at a drug corner to deter dealing, for instance, while calling up camera shots of other high-crime locales throughout the city. Back at the station house, a detective rides the same public camera system, zooming in on a license plate, say, to see if a car is stolen or if its driver is wanted on an outstanding warrant. Borgo is even building a room in the reception area with 42 large screens that will display live shots from all over the city—a public display of the department's surveillance capacities, which criminals already falsely believe are all-encompassing. "And I'm going to get civilians to monitor them: they see as well as people in uniform," he adds slyly.

Gunshot-detection sensors at various locations alert headquarters immediately when a gun gets discharged outdoors. Cameras then take pictures around the source of the shot, with an emphasis on roads and nearby arteries leaving the city, since in 70 percent of East Orange shootings, someone zooms off afterward in a car. The department also plans to introduce license-recognition technology that will automatically tell the police when a stolen car has entered the city.

Bratton famously drew on business principles to transform the NYPD bureaucracy into a crime-fighting machine—a bottom-line orientation that Cordero has absorbed as well. "You have to treat this business as if it were your own," he says. "A Fortune 500 company is in the business of making money; we're in the business of saving lives. Can I survive a year without a return on my investment? Maybe. Five years? No." Cordero regards the public as the consumers of policing services. "We don't accept excuses when we're shopping if any item is not available; we expect supply to be consistent with demand," he points out. "The public should not accept excuses from the police."

Moreover, Cordero argues, a police department must respond to what consumers actually want from it, not to what it thinks they should want. The two things are not necessarily identical, as Broken Windows theorists point out and police departments discover time and again. "In the South Bronx, we took out the gangs; violence plummeted," he recalls. "I expected kudos, but instead people asked what we were doing about stolen cars, prostitution, and Saturday night boom boxes." Consistent with his business-service model, Cordero started sending civilian inspectors to East Orange households where officers had answered 911 calls, to poll residents about the officers' performances. These audits, like the directed patrols, were initially unpopular among some members of the rank and file but are also now regarded as routine.

Crime continues to fall in East Orange, half a year after Cordero left the department to become New Jersey's first gang-violence czar and bring intelligence-driven policing to the entire state. As of mid-June 2008, crime in East Orange was down another 15 percent over the same period in 2007, even as violence remains high in perennially murder-torn cities like Camden.

And the sense of urgency about crime-fighting, which it is the Compstat mechanism's supreme

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accomplishment to institutionalize, has not abated. Early one Wednesday morning in May, a fatal shooting took place in an East Orange apartment—an apparent drug assassination. Borgo had been working on the case since 4 AM. The crime dashboard showed that except for the homicide, no crimes had been reported in the city through mid-morning. "It's a good day in one sense," Borgo says, "but you can't have a good day when your one crime is the ugliest one of all. I'm not having a good day; I'm having a terrible day." He tried to take heart from the overall statistics. The night shift was down 73 percent in crimes that week, compared with the same week last year; the day shift was down 81 percent. And over the last five months, the department was still down one murder from the previous year, even after that morning's shooting. "We're going to keep it going by being proactive, but this homicide is a *major* concern to me," he agonizes.

"East Orange cops have 'virtual directed patrol' screens in their cars that let them watch two places simultaneously."

Cordero is amazed that the most radical premise of Compstat policing—that the police can lower crime—is still not universally held among top managers. "When I hear from chiefs, 'Crime results from the economy,' my response is: 'And you haven't retired . . . why?' " As for Borgo, he keeps a large graph of the city's historic crime drop on a wall in the police station to imbue his beat officers with the urgency of their mission. "People were being victimized at an unbelievable rate before," he says. "If crime was still at 2003 levels, we'd have 14,000 more victims today."

Other NYPD grads have also had a significant effect on their new cities through the application of Compstat principles, easily outstripping national crime averages. For example, Jane Perlov, a former NYPD deputy chief, brought violence in Raleigh, North Carolina, down 33 percent between 2001 and 2007 by breaking the city up into six police districts and making the district leaders responsible for crime on their watches. John Romero, an NYPD deputy inspector, lowered crime in Lawrence, Massachusetts, over 50 percent from 1999 to 2005 by demanding performance from his commanders and basing strategies on the most up-to-date, accurate information. Timoney, the first NYPD Compstat-era commander to take the reins of another department, reduced homicides in Philadelphia over 25 percent in two years—the first homicide decrease that violent city had seen in 15 years. And Bratton has slashed crime by 34 percent since becoming chief of the LAPD.

An NYPD hire can produce these effects because, as Cordero discovered, Compstat crime analysis and accountability are far from ubiquitous, despite their proven track record. "These were new principles to people here," says Thomas Belfiore, who took over the Westchester County Department of Public Safety in 2003. "I asked for monthly reports; they were all verbiage. Very little was actually measured."

Even if some version of Compstat has preceded an NYPD grad, it likely lacks the requisite oomph. "There was a Compstat here before," observes Edmund Hartnett, the feisty chief of the Yonkers Police Department, "but—how to say this diplomatically?—it was city hall–driven; there was little interaction over strategies and tactics." Hartnett has posted the funeral card of Compstat's primary architect, the late Jack Maple, on his wall, so that "the Jackster" will always be watching over him. Maple would presumably be pleased that Hartnett brought crime to a ten-year low in Yonkers during his first year leading the department in 2007. "We weren't getting crime updates before," says Sergeant Mike Papaleo, head of Yonkers's newly energized Street Crimes Unit, which targets guns and violent crime. It could take a couple of weeks for data to trickle down to the field. "Now, because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the information out of Compstat, I can assign my guys to immediately tackle patterns as they emerge." Commanders like Papaleo also receive news of individual crimes on their BlackBerrys every three hours.

New York City is ringed to its north by Compstat graduates. Nearly all the major jurisdictions in Westchester County—Yonkers, White Plains, Mount Vernon, Rye, and the county itself—are now led by a crime-analysis disciple. In some quarters, this has produced—along with crime drops—an even greater level of the usual resentment against outsiders. One Westchester County chief asked another, who had been brought in from New York: "Why is the NYPD always getting these jobs? They should be our jobs." Keeping NYPD memorabilia in one's office to a minimum is advisable, the NYPD veteran suggests. Cordero studied management manuals to prepare himself for shaking up the East Orange force. He overcame the inevitable resistance to change "by quick victories and a vision of where we wanted to go," he says. "It's a *huge* challenge, telling a deputy chief with 30 years' experience: 'We're doing things differently now.'"

NYPD recruits also have to be careful not to bring NYPD-scale demands to their new departments. After all, no other police department in the country has the resources available to New York commanders. "Your education in the NYPD is invaluable, but [it makes] you think that's how the rest of the world is," Westchester County chief Belfiore warns other new bosses. "You're used to pressing a button and saying: 'I need a communication unit that speaks Spanish to help me find a missing five-year-old.' Get ready: you'll have a girl on the emergency services team who lives in [remote] Dutchess County, and you'll have to wait an hour for her to get dressed and show up. You *really* have to temper your impatience. You can beat them down and take the heart out of them."

David Chong, the affable commissioner of the greatly overstretched Mount Vernon agency, outlines the triage decisions that commanders in less lavishly funded departments face: "In the NYPD, to move 20 to 30 officers in response to a problem is nothing; here, it's an entire shift. If I want to do a weekend sweep to take back a corner, I have to pay half the force overtime to come in, and that means I'm taking from the budget of other city services. You have to learn that it's a marathon, not a sprint." Chong has compensated for thin staffing by pressing his detectives to get as much intelligence as they can from victims as well as their assailants, since in his jurisdiction, today's robbery victim may well be tomorrow's perpetrator. He lowered violent crime 18 percent in 2007, but he longs for more manpower: "I could drive crime completely down in the central city if I had the resources," he says wistfully.

But perhaps the biggest challenge that an NYPD transplant faces is not local resentment or a drastically reduced force but rather the clout that police unions possess elsewhere. "In the NYPD, no one sees the union contract," says Pat Harnett, a major player in the Compstat revolution who ran the Hartford Police Department from 2004 to 2006. "In smaller departments, it's the first thing they'll show you: 'This is the contract; you can't do anything outside it.'" Labor-management relations were Cordero's biggest challenge in Newton. "It's a different culture up there," he reports. "If you say, 'Officer, you need to get out of your car,' you get back: 'It's not in my contract, we need additional pay for that.'" In strong civil service systems, officers, not their commanders, in essence decide in which posts they will serve, based on seniority. In small towns, too, the union chief may live next door to the mayor and talk to him every day about the unreasonable demands that the new chief is placing on the department.

Union recalcitrance has driven some New York stars away from new jobs. John Timoney left the Philadelphia department, where he had little ability to put his top picks into leadership positions, "fed up with banging my head against the wall" with the unions over officer discipline and personnel decisions, he says. Former NYPD intelligence commander Dan Oates left the Ann Arbor department, he reports, frustrated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the power of Michigan's labor law to "crush positive change."

And a Newark police union has mounted an audacious challenge to Garry McCarthy, Newark's only hope for escaping its decades-long stranglehold of violence. McCarthy, a Maple protégé and battle-hardened street cop, served as the NYPD's chief crime strategist from 1999 to 2006. Since taking over the civilian position of police director in Newark in late 2006, McCarthy has moved accountability for crime to his precinct commanders, required 150 officers to leave their desks to fight crime on the streets—including, most controversially, on nights and weekends—and beefed up the department's analytic abilities. He has also uncovered gross mismanagement of the department's overtime budget. For his labors, the union representing Newark's sergeants, lieutenants, and captains is suing to strip him of his powers, alleging that he is encroaching on those of the uniformed police chief. McCarthy is undaunted: "These people are gnats to me," he told the *Newark Star-Ledger*. "I'm here with a mission." If he wins the suit, McCarthy is confident of his future success. Homicides were down 44 percent in the first half of 2008 compared with the previous year. "We're only scratching the surface here in Newark," he says. "Wait till we start getting complicated."

"Perhaps the biggest challenge that an NYPD transplant faces is the clout that police unions possess elsewhere."

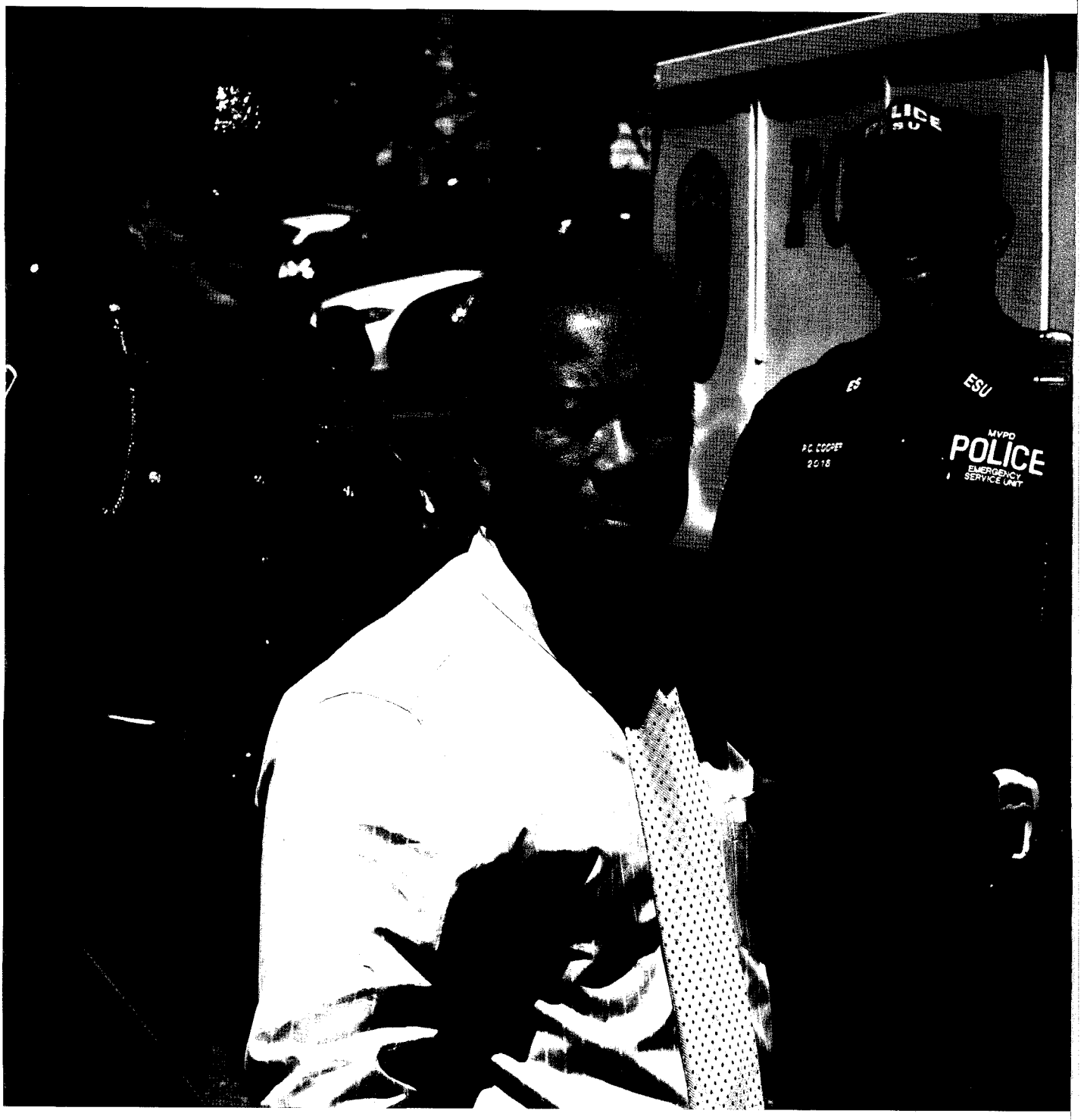
The absence of a regressive union culture in Gotham may help explain why the caliber of NYPD top brass is so high. Its executives stand "head and shoulders above the competition," one ex-NYPD leader observes, perhaps because they actually have the authority to lead and innovate. New York City should reward its police unions, Oates says, for their unacknowledged flexibility.

For all the adjustments that smaller departments require of their new chiefs, they do offer ambitious crime-fighters an unparalleled intimacy with the communities that they serve. This April, Mount Vernon commissioner Chong was popping across to City Hall to snag a reporter an impromptu meeting with the mayor when a large man in a dented SUV politely accosted him. The driver had recently opened a bakery on a commercial thoroughfare and had noticed people streaming into and out of a nearby store without buying anything. There had already been a drug bust at the store, but it looked as though the activity had started up again. "Now I'm scared for my wife, who sometimes works alone" at the bakery, the businessman told Chong. Chong promised to follow up on the matter; he has since visited the bakery twice on his ubiquitous bike. The drug investigation is ongoing, but the couple is satisfied with the department's response. "Chong's a great guy," the baker, Michael, enthused. "He's approachable and makes you feel like he's paying attention."

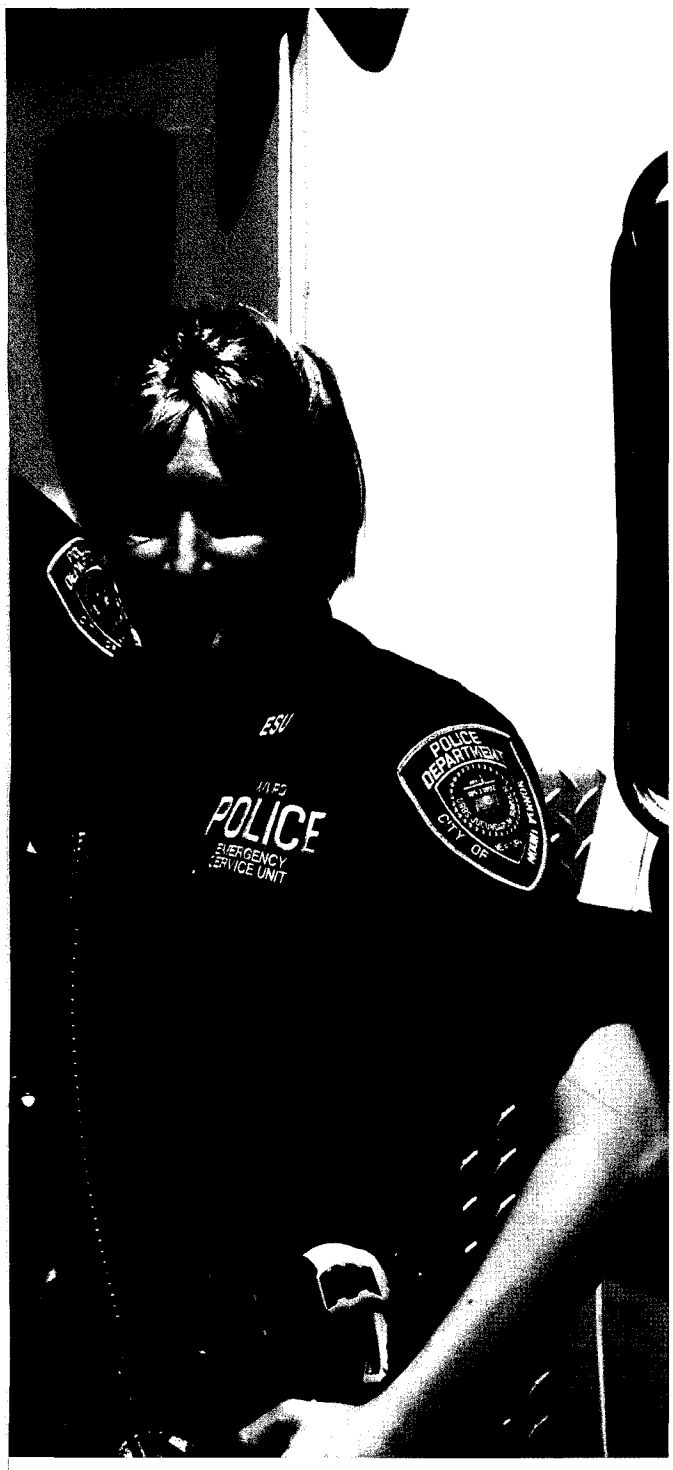
Michael is just the sort of asset that long-struggling Mount Vernon needs. Forward-looking and optimistic, he has decided to invest in the city in the hope that it will experience the same turnaround that he witnessed in the Bronx and White Plains on his bread routes. "I see more foot traffic and stores coming my way," he says. Owners are trying to organize a business improvement district, despite the difficult economy. "Everyone's taking pride in their buildings and fixing up storefronts. It's just a matter of time before everything is built up."

Chong and his NYPD peers are acutely aware of the value of entrepreneurs like Michael, and they know how crucial policing is to their success. "If I can remove the fear of crime from this area," Chong asserts, "people will come, developers will come. If it can be done in Harlem and on 42nd Street, it can be done here." The redevelopment of Yonkers's leafy waterfront, a short water-taxi ride away from Wall Street,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



began before Ed Hartnett took over the police department, but its continuing viability rests on keeping crime down. And East Orange has added yet more proof to the assertion that Cordero made at his 2004 swearing-in: "It's been proven, time and again, that safety is vital to the rebirth of great American cities." Standing-room-only crowds engage in bidding wars at auctions of commercial and residential properties; the city's stately old homes are getting long-overdue makeovers; and neighboring Orange, still mired in corruption and crime, looks on enviously at East Orange's policing revolution.

Cordero, Hartnett, and other members of the NYPD diaspora have been hit with the usual racial-profiling charges as they try to rid their cities of criminals; Yonkers has even had a visit from Al Sharpton himself. The race-baiters are oblivious to the fact that the greatest beneficiaries of proactive policing are blacks, who make up the overwhelming share of urban crime victims. The sixties-era excuse for crime has it exactly backward: crime is not the result of a bad urban economy, but it will certainly contribute to one. When crime declines, not only are black lives saved, but urban economies can rebound and provide jobs to people with the drive to get ahead.

The anti-cop agitators may be indifferent to the toll of crime on the people they claim to care about, but the black mayors whom several members of the NYPD diaspora work for are not. "We make it no secret that public safety is paramount," says Mount Vernon mayor Clinton Young. "As long as the kids are safe, and the elderly safe, we are doing our job." And as long as Compstat policing, the motor of New York City's unanticipated turnaround in the 1990s, continues to spread throughout the United States, more of America's great cities can look forward to futures of safety—and of opportunity, wealth, and creativity.

With limited resources, Mount Vernon police commissioner David Chong reduced violent crime by nearly 20 percent in 2007.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Economics Does Not Lie

The dismal science is at last a *science*—and the world is the beneficiary.

EMANUEL DE WITTE/NATIONAL GALLERY COLLECTION; BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON/CORBIS

Guy Sorman

Though economics as a discipline arose in Great Britain and France at the end of the eighteenth century, it has taken two centuries to reach the threshold of scientific rationality. Previously, intuition, opinion, and conviction enjoyed equal status in economic thought; theories were vague, often unverifiable. Not so long ago, one could teach economics at prestigious universities without using equations and certainly without the complex algorithms, precise (though not infallible) mathematical models, and computers integral to the field today.

No wonder bad economic policies ravaged entire nations during the twentieth century, producing more victims than any epidemic did. The collectivization of land in Russia during the twenties, in China during the fifties, and in Tanzania during the sixties starved hundreds of millions of peasants. The uncontrolled printing of currency destabilized Weimar Germany, facilitating the rise of Nazism. The nationalization of enterprises and the expulsion of entrepreneurs ruined Argentina during the forties and Egypt a decade later. India's License Raj—requiring businesses to obtain a host of permits before opening their doors—froze the country's economic development for decades, keeping millions impoverished.

Economists now agree: the free market is the most efficient of all economic systems.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On an even larger scale, the century witnessed a war between two economic systems: state socialism and market capitalism. In the socialist system, property was public, competition forbidden, and production planned. In the market system, property was private, competition encouraged, and production determined by entrepreneurs. Faced with the choice of which system was superior, nations hesitated and economists remained divided.

The state of affairs today is entirely different. When the Soviet Union crumbled, the socialist model that it embodied imploded, too—or, more precisely, the Soviet Union fell because the socialist economic system proved unworkable. Now only one economic system exists: market capitalism. Virtually everywhere, the public sector has given ground to privatization; currency has escaped state control, to be governed by independent central banks; competition has taken wing, thanks to the deregulation of markets and the opening of borders; taxation has become less progressive, so as to encourage entrepreneurs and create jobs.

The results have been breathtaking. Opening economies and promoting trade have helped reconstruct Eastern Europe after 1990 and lifted 800 million people, many of them in China, Brazil, and a now-license-free India, out of poverty. Even in Africa and the Arab Middle East, nations that have embraced capitalism have begun to escape from the terrible underdevelopment that has long plagued them.

Behind all this unprecedented growth is not only the collapse of state socialism but also a scientific revolution in economics, as yet dimly understood by the public but increasingly embraced by policymakers around the globe. The revolution began during the sixties and has finally brought economists to a broad, well-founded consensus about what constitutes good policy. No longer does economics lie; no longer would Baudelaire be able to write that "economics is a horror." For the mass of mankind, on the contrary, it has become a source of hope.

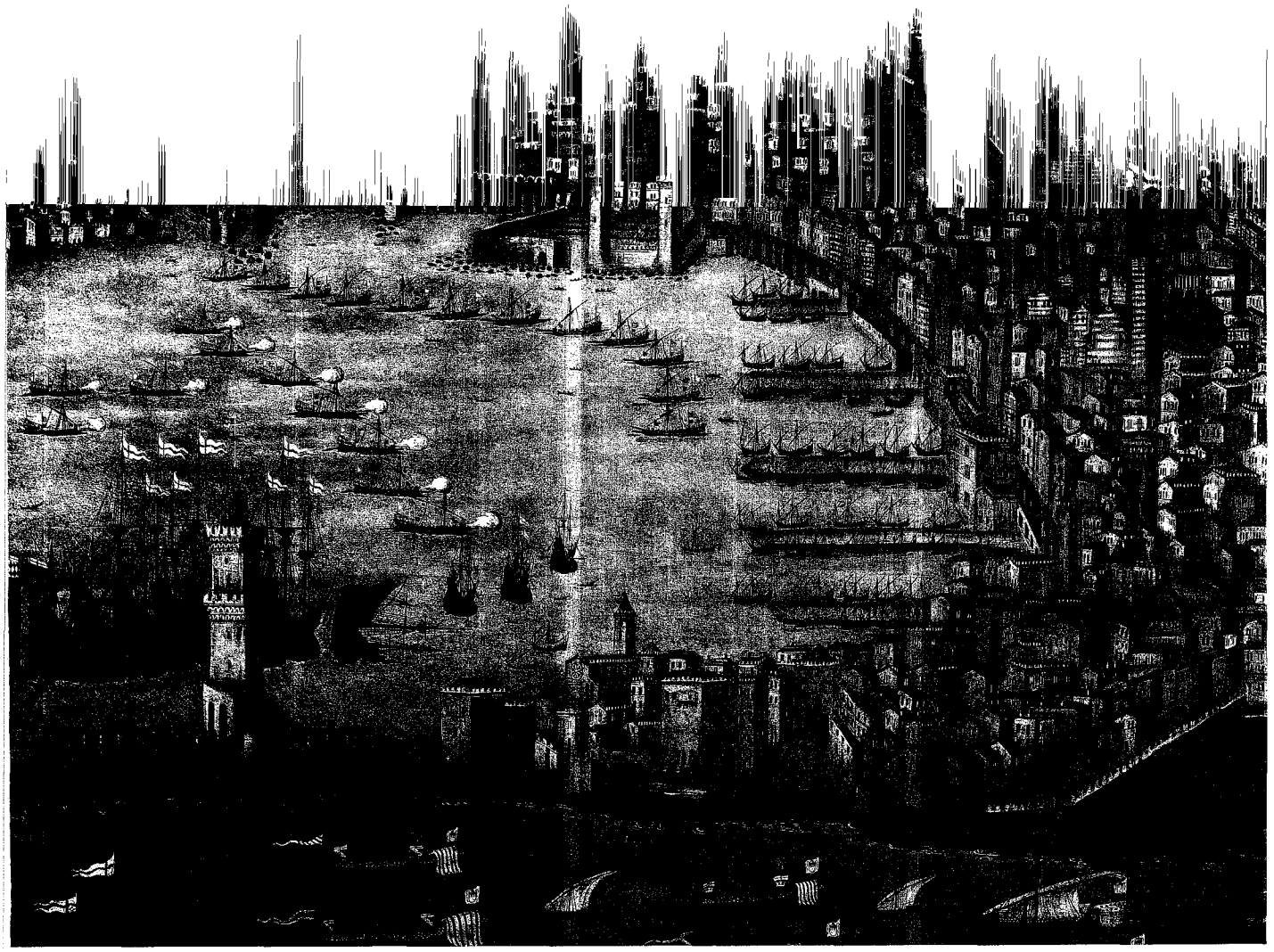
If economics is finally a science, what, exactly, does it teach? With the help of Columbia University economist Pierre-André Chiappori, I have synthesized its findings into ten propositions. Almost all top economists—those who are recognized as such by their peers and who publish in the leading scientific journals—would endorse them (the exceptions are those like Joseph Stiglitz and Jeffrey Sachs, whose public pronouncements are more political than scientific). The more the public understands and embraces these propositions, the more prosperous the world will become.

1. The market economy is the most efficient of all economic systems. Adam Smith's eighteenth-century take on market efficiency was metaphorical, nearly metaphysical: he said that it seemed to be guided by an "invisible hand" that produced outcomes beneficial to society. In the mid-twentieth century, Friedrich Hayek observed that no central-planning institution could possibly manage the huge quantity of information that the market organized automatically and spontaneously by pricing resources. More recently, Berkeley economist Gérard Debreu has used computers to demonstrate that the spontaneous order that Hayek postulated does indeed exist in a mathematical world.

Market mechanisms are so efficient that they can manage threats to long-term development, such as the exhaustion of natural resources, far better than states can. If global warming does become a real problem, for example, price mechanisms or a carbon tax would easily encourage a more efficient use of energy. It's worth recalling that during the 1970s, when an excess of sulfur in the atmosphere was sometimes producing acid rain harmful to North American forests, the U.S. government didn't ban sulfur emissions outright. Instead, it created a market in which companies could buy and sell the right to pollute above a certain amount or "cap," pricing emissions so that factories had a financial incentive to turn to non-sulfurous technology, which was already available. Over time, companies shifted to cleaner technology and the acid rain disappeared—to the dismay of many green activists, who tend to prefer doomsday discourse to efficient market solutions.

CRISTOFORO GRASSI/THE ART ARCHIVE/NAVAL MUSEUM GENOA/GIANNI DAGLI ORTI

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The medieval Genoese built reliable economic institutions that allowed them to finance far-flung commercial expeditions.

Some economists favor free markets not only for their efficiency in allocating resources but for political reasons as well, fearing that central planning or excessive bureaucratic controls could, in the guise of rationality, stifle individual freedom. Markets leave us "free to choose," wrote Rose and Milton Friedman, and society is the better off for it—though not all economists embrace their libertarian political vision.

2. Free trade helps economic development. As Smith observed when his native Scotland began to benefit from free trade, it is through access to the world market that poor nations become rich. They never do so by trying to become self-sufficient. Free trade also makes rich countries richer, economists agree. By importing less expensive goods made in low-wage nations like China, wealthy nations effectively increase their own citizens' income—and the main beneficiaries are poor and middle-class people, who can buy cheaper clothes, electronics, and myriad other goods. In addition, importing cheaper components—computer chips, say—lowers the cost of equipment in wealthier economies. In fact, economists have long understood the law of comparative advantage: whenever differences in the cost of producing goods exist between two countries, both will benefit from free trade, a mechanism that allocates their resources most effectively.

Free trade not only generates the greatest possible growth; it tends to distribute it widely, both within nations and among them. For evidence, consider the emergence of vast middle classes in all free-market societies, as well as the economic convergence among nations that have embraced capitalist economics. After less than 20 years of market-driven growth, Brazil, China, and India—whatever their injustices—are closer to the Western level of development than they were before that growth got under way.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This does not mean, as some observers fret or gleefully predict, that the United States is about to stop leading the world economically. Other nations may draw closer to it—Western Europe in 1950 had a per-capita income half that of the U.S.; now it's 80 percent—but the American economy has remained the world's most vigorous for more than a century because of its superior efficiency, demographic dynamism, and innovation (today, for example, the U.S. is the world leader in the hugely promising fields of nanotechnology and biotechnology). One might add that no globalization, with all its economic benefits, could take place without a global security framework to protect shipping from piracy and to contain border conflicts. Today the U.S. military provides that security, just as the British navy once did.

3. Good institutions help development. The research of Stanford University economist Avner Greif makes a forceful case for this proposition. Back in the twelfth century, he notes, Genoese merchants competed fiercely with the Maghrebis, Jews from northwest Africa. The Maghrebis relied entirely on family and tribal connections to raise funds for their business ventures; powerful as they were, this tribalism limited their resources and hence the reach of their commercial expeditions. The Genoese, on the other hand, built institutions to bolster good economic practices, such as private contracts, insurance firms, bills of trade, bank credit, courts of appeal to handle disputes, and a financial market, from which they could raise capital to finance far-flung journeys. The Genoese also founded a city-state, probably the first state to follow the rule of law. Over time, they won the competition and the Maghrebis faded away. Familial trust proved no match for reliable, neutral institutions.

All economists acknowledge today that economic development requires an independent and reliable legal system to enforce contracts and ensure fair competition. Institutions that improve market transparency are particularly important, since they counter what Nobel laureate George Akerlof calls "asymmetrical information." Economic actors don't all have the same information at their disposal. Without institutions to improve transparency, insiders can easily manipulate markets, making outside investors lose faith in the system and withdraw their funds. This is why the government bans insider trading.

In complex free economies, private informational intermediaries, such as ratings agencies, also spring up, helping economic actors make relatively well-informed decisions in the labyrinths of global finance. These intermediaries aren't perfect, of course, as financial crises like the Enron collapse in 2001 or the current mortgage meltdown show: investors, relying on them, believed for far too long that Enron was a healthy company and that bonds backed by subprime mortgages carried virtually no risk. But in general, the intermediaries improve the operation of modern markets.

Some argue that a new field of research, neuroeconomics, inaugurated by the psychologist Daniel Kahneman, who won a Nobel in economics in 2002 for his work, demonstrates the need for greater activity by the most powerful institution of all: government. This field shows that economic actors tend to behave both rationally and irrationally. Laboratory work has demonstrated that one part of our brain bears blame for many of our economically mistaken short-term decisions, while another is responsible for decisions that make economic sense, usually taking a longer view. Just as the state protects us from Akerlof's asymmetry by forbidding insider trading, should it also protect us from our own irrational impulses? To a certain extent, it already does—for example, by giving borrowers a grace period in which they may decide not to take out a loan after all. Jean Tirole, a French expert on the subject, suggests that knowing about our irrationality should compel the private sector to inform consumers better about the consequences of their actions—again, the mortgage crisis comes to mind—but that it would be preposterous to use behavioral economics to justify restoring excessive state regulations. After all, the state is no more rational than the individual, and its actions can have enormously destructive consequences. Neuroeconomics should encourage us to make markets more transparent, not more regulated.

There is less agreement among economists on which other institutions are essential, and less

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still on how to create them. Democracy, for example: its relation to economic development resists any unequivocal description, as each seems to evolve on its own plane. (There are cases of capitalism without democracy—such as China—but none of democracy without market capitalism.) Analyses also diverge, but these days only marginally, on the roles of culture, history, and religion in creating the institutional conditions for prosperity. Until the sixties, many sociologists, embracing Max Weber's cultural determinism, believed that culture was the cornerstone of economic development. According to Weber, Confucianism was incompatible with economic growth. But the rise of South Korea and Taiwan has put paid to that theory. Some today say that Islam impedes development, but both Turkey and Indonesia are growing at a fast clip.

"The U.S. is the world leader in the hugely promising fields of nanotechnology and biotechnology."

4. The best measure of a good economy is its growth. Unlike other proposed measures (happiness, for example), economic growth can be determined objectively: it is the rate of increase in a country's gross domestic product (GDP) over a given period. Yes, some economists believe it necessary to temper that purely quantitative measurement with such factors as quality of life and efficient management of resources, and there is wide agreement that GDP omits important aspects of economic activity, such as home production. But all economists agree on growth's importance: while a high rate of growth doesn't solve every problem, its absence doesn't solve *any*.

Economic science also distinguishes between long- and short-term growth. As Nobel Prize winner Edward Prescott has shown, long-term growth—in the West, roughly 2 percent per capita per year over the last century—results from capital accumulation and, above all, technological innovation, which makes labor ever more productive. States have few ways to promote this long-term trend, but those they do have are key: improving the rule of law, securing property, developing infrastructure, and enhancing the quality of education.

Governments also have the capacity to intervene and create seemingly positive outcomes when it comes to short-term growth, which is subject to incessant fluctuation. Yet the eventual effects of such interventions, which are more likely to have political than economic motivations, are always costly and can ultimately slow growth. The U.S. government's recent rebate checks are a good example. While taxpayers have a few more dollars in their pockets right now, perhaps giving the economy a brief boost, the checks add more than $100 billion to the nation's debt and could push inflation higher, adding to long-term economic woes.

The Anglo-Bengali economist Amartya Sen, another Nobel laureate, has distinguished—usefully, to my mind—growth that takes place under democratic conditions from that which occurs under tyranny. In China's case, the Communist Party channels the country's newly generated wealth less to benefit the people than to build a powerful state with imperial ambitions (see "The Empire of Lies," Spring 2007). But in a democracy like India, where popular demands cannot be ignored, the wealth trickles down to the people, improving the daily lives of most Indians. Over time, Sen argues, democratic institutions provide a more stable basis for development, since they are predictable, whereas authoritarian rule is not.

5. Creative destruction is the engine of economic growth. As the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter famously argued, capitalism unleashes a "gale" of innovation that "incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one." This ceaseless replacement of the old with the new—driven by technical innovation and entrepreneurialism, itself

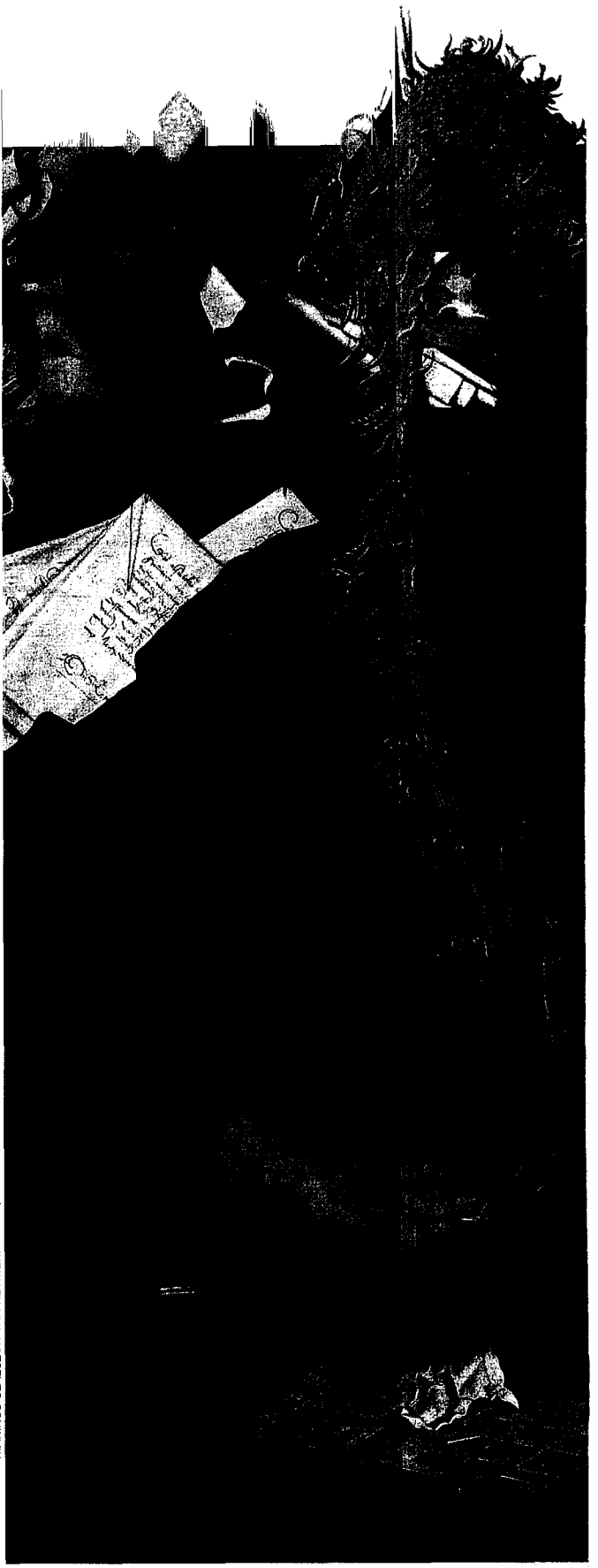
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

encouraged by good economic policies—brings prosperity, though those displaced by the process, who find their jobs made redundant, can understandably object to it.

6. Monetary stability, too, is necessary for growth; inflation is always harmful. No reputable economist today would deny that a stable money supply encourages investment and bolsters social cohesion, since it helps people save for the future. Inflation, on the other hand—always caused by governments' spending more money than they have, and then printing extra money or borrowing to finance the expenditure—destroys entrepreneurship, slows growth, and generates social inequality. It is an incentive not for investment but for speculation: those who can afford to will buy goods, wait, and then resell them at higher prices, a process that creates nothing at home—least of all, new jobs. Those with less money fall victim as wages and pensions lag behind prices. It's no surprise that hyperinflation often leads to revolution. Milton Friedman's advocacy of monetary stability, "monetarism," considered revolutionary when first proposed in the sixties, is now common wisdom.

The best way to restrain inflation, economists now understand, is to transfer money management from governments to independent central banks like the Federal Reserve and the European Bank, which—monetarists all, these days—try to create only enough credit to provide liquidity and prevent the financial panic that often accompanies credit crunches, resisting vocal politicians who believe that printing more would generate new jobs. Even in a slowdown, the banks seek to keep money stable in order to stimulate investment.

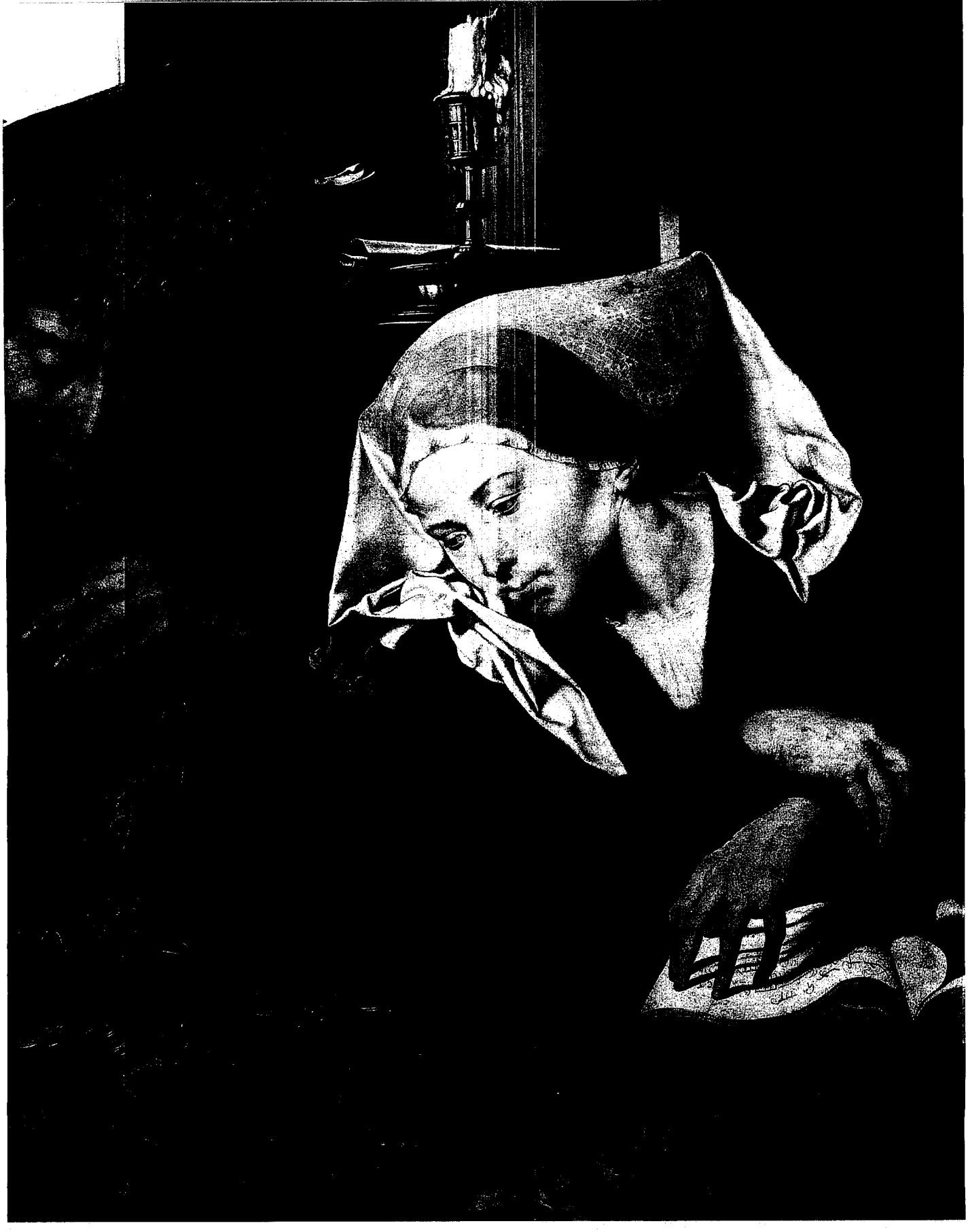
7. Unemployment among unskilled workers is largely determined by how much labor costs. So regulating the labor market (with a minimum wage, for example) adds to labor costs, economists acknowledge, and increases unemployment. No solution to excessive unemployment is



MARINUS CLAESZON VAN REYMERSWAELE, "THE BANKER AND HIS WIFE"/THE ART ARCHIVE/MUSEO DEL PRADO MADRID/ALFREDO DAGLI ORTI

The creation of complex financial instruments brings about economic progress: nothing real has ever been produced without first being financed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conceivable without reducing such regulations. The rigidity of European labor markets—in France, for example, firing an employee requires paying him a large indemnity and obtaining a judge's consent—is likely one reason that the unemployment rate in European countries remains much higher than in the United States.

8. While the welfare state is necessary in some form, it isn't always effective. Economists recognize that government assistance always produces incentives that may affect, for good or ill, recipients' behavior and well-being. The key is to avoid making individuals and groups dependent on state assistance, locking them into sustained semi-poverty. This economic truth is now better accepted in the U.S., where welfare reform triumphed in the nineties, than in statist Western Europe. Central and Eastern European countries, because of their socialist experience, are more attuned to the dangers of welfare dependency.

9. The creation of complex financial markets has brought about economic progress. These sophisticated instruments, like derivatives, have facilitated risk-sharing on a global scale, boosting innovation and hence prosperity. There is no economic rationale for distinguishing this "virtual capitalism" from "real capitalism": nothing real has ever been produced without first being financed. The new instruments aren't free of problems, as seen in the subprime failure. Financial enterprises are enterprises like any other—they think up new ideas, try them out, and sometimes crash. But even in a time of financial crisis, the global benefits of the new financial markets have surpassed their costs. The debate among economists today concerns only the degree of transparency and regulation necessary for their effective functioning.

10. Competition is usually desirable. Beyond that, there is no unanimity: some economists believe that under certain circumstances, a private or public monopoly may contribute to innovation or progress. What kind of protection to extend to intellectual property is also disputed. Economists remember that a British patent protected James Watt's steam engine from competitors from 1769 through 1790, stalling the Industrial Revolution. To what extent do patents for computer software or drugs slow or enhance progress? The most creative period in Silicon Valley's history took place before the patenting of software, it's worth noting. Stanford University's Paul Romer, the leading U.S. economist in this field, suggests that the answer may be "soft property"—short-term property rights that would make research worthwhile without hindering competition unduly.

These ten propositions should guide all economic policymaking, and to an increasing degree they do, worldwide. Does this mean that we've reached an "end of history" in economics, to borrow a phrase made famous by Francis Fukuyama, by way of Hegel and Alexandre Kojève? In one sense, perhaps: economic science will never rediscover the virtues of hyperinflation or industrial nationalization. Some critics charge that economics is not a science in the way that, say, physics is—after all, economists can't make precise predictions, as an exact science can. But this isn't quite true: economists *can* predict that certain bad policies will lead necessarily to catastrophe. If economics, a human science, lacks the precision of physics, a natural one, it advances the same way—evolving from one theory to the next, each approximating a reality that eludes our complete grasp.

But if we understand the end of history in economics to mean the complete realization, in practice, of the findings of economic science, then it has not arrived. The free market still has enemies and critics, ranging from those who dream of a world more just, more spiritual, or transformed in some other utopian way to those who simply seek to defend their own narrow material interests to those legitimate researchers who try to look beyond the market. And we must not overlook ignorance: economic principles aren't widely understood among the public or even among lawmakers. The indisputable fact that the world has experienced a long period of growth as global trade has expanded remains strangely unknown. Doubtless the news is too good.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the future, the threat to the beneficent influence of economic science will come less from tired socialist revolutionary rhetoric than from new dangers, such as terrorism and epidemics. Terrorism is, in part, a consequence of globalization: young, uprooted people unable to adapt to a dynamic, capitalist world invent new global ideologies and seek to put them into practice with global weapons. Globalization can also accelerate the proliferation of deadly illnesses. The AIDS epidemic was the first global attack by a mutant virus; SARS, avian flu, or some unknown illness could follow, surging from uncontrolled Chinese, Indian, or African backwaters and following the massive migrations of a global economy. Terror and epidemics could both unleash political upheavals that would undermine the market order itself.

Then there's the fear of ecological disturbances, which could result in incoherent policies that wouldn't necessarily diminish risks to the environment but might prevent development and thus harm the interests of the poorest peoples. One example: prohibiting genetically modified organisms—which, evidence suggests, pose no threat whatsoever to the environment—will hurt the productivity of farming at a time when global demand for food will grow.

Another danger is inseparable from the very nature of economic systems: growth is cyclical. Despite the present anxiety about a recession, the time of major global economic crises seems to have passed, in large part because the progress of economic science allows governments and economic actors to understand crises and manage them better. The Great Depression probably couldn't happen again, since the political mistakes that aggravated it, such as protectionism and the drying-up of credit, aren't as likely to be repeated in the future: the Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, and the Bank of England have demonstrated as much in the current mortgage crisis by supporting the banking system. But smaller crises are inevitable, bound up as they are with innovation—and as the new drives out the old in creative destruction and forces sometimes painful adaptations, we find these upheavals harder to bear as we grow more accustomed to perpetual growth.

"Despite the present anxiety about a recession, the time of major global economic crises seems to have passed."

Similarly, free trade means that some people will lose their jobs, as we all know; foreign competition can wipe out entire companies or even entire industries. We all know it because, as Friedman argued, layoffs and closings get disproportionate media coverage. Meanwhile, nobody talks about the ongoing reduction in prices for consumers and investors, scattered among a huge number of beneficiaries. That helps explain why politicians are prone to deride free trade and voters are too often ready to agree.

To help the losers in the free market, government shouldn't back away from either free trade or creative destruction and start subsidizing doomed and obsolete activities, a protectionist course that guarantees only economic decline. Instead, it should help the losers change jobs more easily by improving educational opportunities and by facilitating new investment, which creates more employment. An essential task of democratic governments and opinion makers when confronting economic cycles and political pressure is to secure and protect the system that has served humanity so well, and not to change it for the worse on the pretext of its imperfection.

Still, this lesson is doubtless one of the hardest to translate into language that public opinion will accept. The best of all possible economic systems is indeed imperfect. Whatever the truths uncovered by economic science, the free market is finally only the reflection of human nature, itself hardly perfectible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Great African-American Awakening

Some brave voices are shifting the conversation from victimhood to responsibility.

Myron Magnet

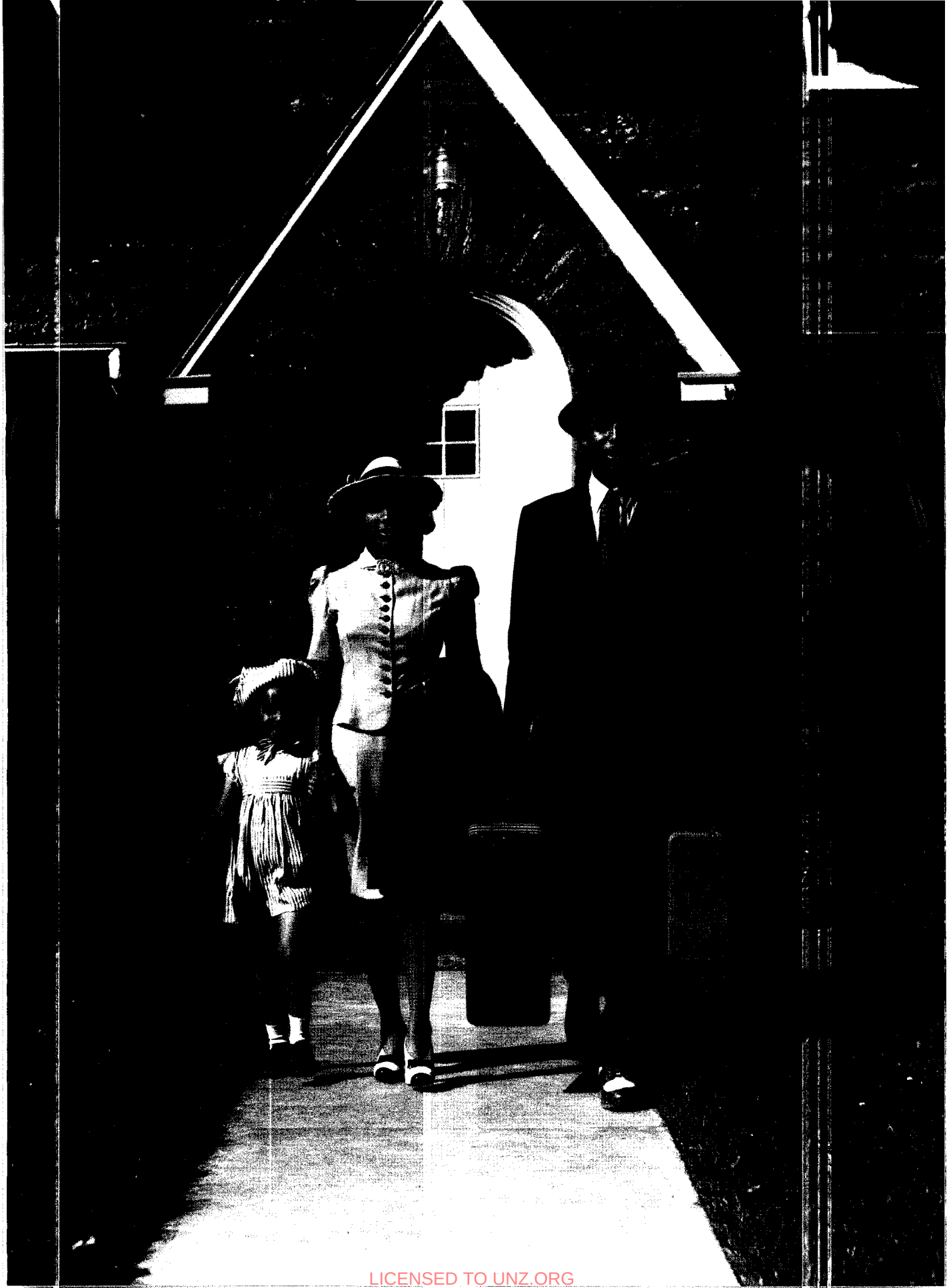
The conversation about race that Barack Obama says America needs is already in full swing—and it is a conversation among blacks. Its spark was a speech that TV star Bill Cosby gave at the NAACP in 2004. In books and articles, on talk shows and in town meetings, at barbecues and barber shops, African-Americans have been arguing over his words ever since. Their impassioned discussion is the most hopeful development in race relations in years.

With a 50 percent high school dropout rate and a 70 percent illegitimacy rate, with African-Americans committing half the nation's murders though only 13 percent of the population, black America—especially the poorer part of it—is in trouble. "We cannot blame white people," Cosby asserted in his incendiary speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* v. *Board* school desegregation decision. "It's not what they're doing to us. It's what we're not doing." As Jesse Jackson used to say, Cosby recalls, "No one can save us from us but us."

Married couples headed three-quarters of black families in 1950, compared with one-third today.

LAMBERT/GETTY IMAGES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sure, racism hasn't vanished, Cosby acknowledges in his 2007 book *Come On People*, a follow-up to his speech written with Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint. "But for all the talk of systemic racism and governmental screw-ups, we must look at ourselves and understand our own responsibility." Even with lingering discrimination, "there are more doors of opportunity open for black people today than ever before in the history of America," and "these doors are tall enough and wide enough" for just about all black people "to walk through with their heads held high." So while "there are forces that make the effort to escape poverty difficult," African-Americans are by no means merely the playthings of vast forces and helpless victims of racism. "When people tell you, 'You can't get up, you're a victim,'" Cosby warns, "that's when you know it is the devil you're hearing."

Why do so many blacks, especially men, find it so hard to grasp the opportunity that is theirs for the taking? Why are "so many of our black youth squandering their freedom?" Cosby and Poussaint's answer is that the social structure and culture of poor black neighborhoods distort the psychology of the children who grow up there, often shackling them in "psychological slavery." The authors zero in on the permanently destructive effects of fractured families and slapdash child rearing—much more slapdash than middle-class parents, with their years spent nurturing, encouraging, and cajoling their children, could easily imagine. "In the neighborhood that most of us grew up in, parenting is not going on," Cosby told the NAACP. "You have the pile-up of these sweet beautiful things born by nature—raised by no one."

Certainly their fathers aren't raising them. That 70 percent illegitimacy rate, troubling in itself, isn't evenly distributed but is concentrated in poor neighborhoods, where it soars above 85 percent and can approach 100 percent. "A house without a father is a challenge," Cosby and Poussaint write. "A neighborhood without fathers is a catastrophe." That's because mothers "have difficulty showing a son how to be a man," a truly toxic problem when there are no father figures around to show boys how to channel their natural aggressiveness in constructive ways. Worse still, the authors muse, "We wonder if much of these kids' rage was born when their fathers abandoned them."

To come into the world already abandoned by your father is damaging enough, but *Come On People* teems with children abandoned by their mothers as well. Many end up among America's half-million foster children, two-thirds of whom—more than *300,000* abused or cast-off souls—are black. We meet a Kentuckian born in a housing project and taken away from her jailed, drug-addicted mother at the age of six. After a string of foster homes and group facilities, she began doing "drugs, alcohol, shoplifting, gangbanging, hustling. I was in and out of jail," she says. "I was angry. I would fight at the drop of a dime." We hear of an eight-year-old smash-and-grab burglar abandoned even more abruptly. A cop tells the authors about catching him. The boy wouldn't say one word, beyond the address of his housing-project home. The officer drove the boy there, followed him into his apartment, and saw his mother on the sofa. The boy finally spoke. "She's dead, ain't she?" And she was, with the needle that killed her lying on the floor. The boy calmly ate a bowl of cereal as he watched the cop deal with the body.

We hear of children abandoned emotionally if not literally. Another cop tells of a seven-year-old he picked up for bashing out car windows. "I'm very good at making these kids cry," the cop said. "But this one, I couldn't touch him." He drove the kid home to what looked like a shack. The boy opened the door, and there was his mother on a mattress on the floor, having sex. The boy walked past the couple "and sealed himself off behind a curtain." The man fled; the mother signed the form the cop held out to her, "pulled the covers over her head, and left her son standing mutely behind the curtain."

These are the extreme cases, but even among normal poor black single-parent families Cosby and Poussaint find child-rearing patterns that prime kids for failure. Since the authors believe that too many black adults "are giving up their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

main responsibility to look after their children," they make a portion of their book a child-raising handbook—an inner-city Dr. Spock—whose sound, simply stated advice makes clear what they think is going wrong in numerous ghetto families. Their optimistic, encouraging precepts, in spite of themselves, lift the curtain on a world of heartrending childhood sorrow and suffering, which ordinarily no one comes to help or comfort, and which leaves scars that never heal.

Above all, they counsel, spare the rod. "Many black parents use physical punishment—not just spanking, but also hitting, slapping, and beating kids with objects," they report. Indeed, "many black parents have told us that physical punishment is part of black culture." But, Cosby and Poussaint warn, "when they beat their kids they are sending a message that it is okay to use violence to resolve conflicts," rather than helping them develop self-control and a sense of right and wrong. Too often, physical punishment turns into child abuse; too often, parents (or caregivers, especially the mother's boyfriend) "beat their kids, not to discipline them, but to exorcise their own demons. . . . They take their anger out on the child," who "serves as a 'whupping' object for peevish adults. . . . These beatings often produce angry children who treat others as violently as they have been treated." The prisons are bursting with grown-up abused children.

In addition to physical abuse, Cosby and Poussaint observe, we've all cringed at hearing inner-city mothers abusing kids verbally as well, making them feel worthless and unwanted. "Words like 'You're stupid,' 'You're an idiot,' 'I'm sorry you were born,' or 'You'll never amount to anything' can stick a dagger in a child's heart." Single mothers angry with men, whether their current boyfriends or their children's fathers, regularly transfer their rage to their sons, since they're afraid to take it out on the adult males. "If they hear their mom say, 'Black men ain't worth s---,' the boys wonder whether that includes them. When their moms yell, 'You're no good, just like your father!' all the doubt goes away." When such racially tinged verbal abuse takes the form of " 'Nigger, I'll kick your f------ black a--,' " the child ends up ashamed of being black, as well—a danger anyway in a society where rumors of black inferiority still echo, if more faintly.

One of black America's most disabling problems, Cosby and Poussaint think, is this wounded anger—of children toward parents, women toward men, men toward their mothers and women in general. Some try self-sedation, whether by "wallowing in sedated victimhood," by music "loud enough to wake the dead," by "a lover or some crack or, if nothing else, a bag of burgers." Another way that "black men have tried to maintain their dignity and to keep control of their anger is by being 'cool.' . . . Many who feel abandoned by a parent protect themselves from being hurt by putting on a cool detachment." Trouble is, beyond becoming emotionally frigid, they too easily lose their cool and explode in violence. Still, their effort is better than the hotheadedness of today's young black gangstas, as touchy and ready to duel to the death as the Three Musketeers. "He dissed me so I shot him" is now a common ghetto refrain, Cosby and Poussaint report. Hence African-Americans account for 44 percent of U.S. prisoners; six out of ten black high school dropouts have been in prison before they hit the age of 40; and what Cosby and Poussaint call "a culture of imprisonment devastates black families and communities."

> **"'You have the pile-up of these sweet beautiful things born by nature—raised by no one,' Cosby told the NAACP."**

We are celebrating a great civil rights victory, Cosby told the NAACP. People actually present in the audience "marched and were hit in the face with rocks" so that black kids could get a decent education. But now?

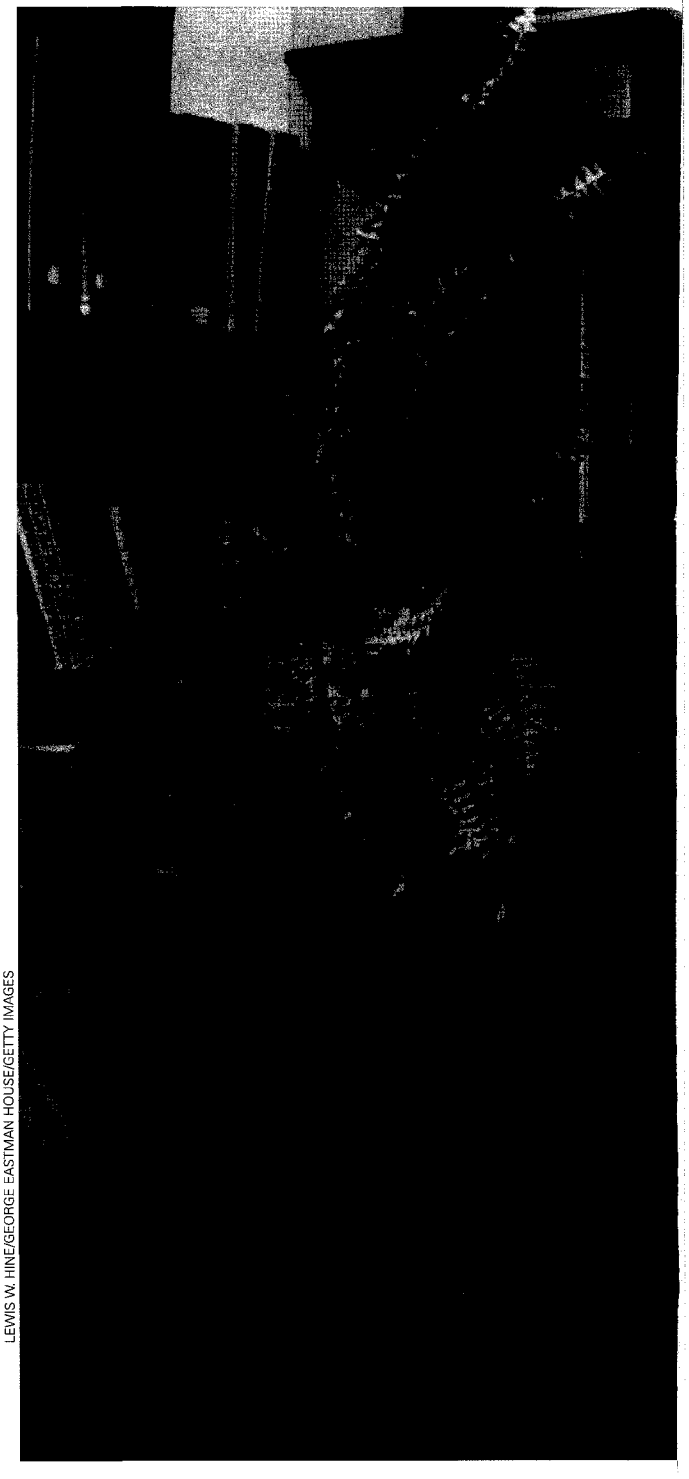
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What the hell good is *Brown* v. *Board of Education* if nobody wants it?" What did those brave marchers achieve if, 50 years later, half of African-American kids drop out of high school and can't speak standard English—especially since all it takes to get started in today's more open America is a high school diploma and the ability to impress potential bosses as articulate, polite, and dependable?

This failure, too, is largely a failure of parenting. Yes, ghetto schools are bad, Cosby and Poussaint acknowledge, and parents can't fix them. "But you can make the best use of what you have to get the best you can for your child," they advise. You can make sure he does his homework and pays attention in class. And much of what a kid learns he learns at home, after all—especially in his crucial first five years. "Talking and reading to infants and children help lay down the physical structures in the brain to develop skills in language," the authors point out.

But many ghetto moms aren't imparting the language and cognitive skills without which children can't succeed once they get to school. "Teachers report that in poor neighborhoods children often begin school not knowing their colors or the letters of the alphabet," Cosby and Poussaint write. "Some have limited vocabularies and little knowledge of numbers. Some don't even know that sheep go 'Baaa.'" These deficits are hard to correct later on. Indeed, "sharp-eyed teachers can identify the children who will become high school dropouts the day they walk in the kindergarten door." The damage is already done.

Readers of *Come On People* and the thousands who waited for hours to hear Cosby press home his message in dozens of free town meetings nationwide will surely profit from his levelheaded advice. They, and thousands more like them, will talk to their kids (in standard English and in a tone that doesn't "sound like a prison guard"), listen to them, read to them, encourage them, discipline them with gentle firmness, limit their TV



LEWIS W. HINE/GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE/GETTY IMAGES

From emancipation to *Brown* v. *Board*, African-Americans saw education as a radical tool of liberation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watching, and never give up on them. But these are the caring parents. The problem is the ones who don't care—who don't understand, as a California doctor tells Cosby, that "you have a choice as to whether to have children or not" and to "decide who gets to be your baby's daddy," and that once you've made that decision, "both of you are supposed to have something to do with that child for the rest of its life." The problem is the girls who view sex, in Cosby's terms, as "You see me. I see you. You want it. . . . We're both hot. Now let's do it"—the girls who have "five or six different children—same woman, eight, ten different husbands or whatever."

What will become of all these "kids with different fathers," who "compete, often unequally, for whatever attention is going around," so that (as with the offspring of polygamous sheikhs) "there is bound to be bad blood"? What can we expect from families with "grandmother, mother, and great grandmother in the same room, raising children, and the child knows nothing about love or respect of any one of the three of them"? How much of the cultivation of civility and virtue, which makes strong families the building blocks of a strong society, can happen here? "When we see these boys walking around the neighborhood," say Cosby and Poussaint, "we imagine them thirty or forty years down the road wandering around just as aimlessly, and we want to cry." For they are lost.

Black conservatives have said such things for years, only to be unthinkingly ostracized as race traitors for breaking with orthodoxy. But no one could dismiss the lovable Cosby: African-Americans are proud of his success and admire his munificence to black charities. What's more, as Princeton prof and sometime rapper Cornel West put it, the TV star "is not in the right wing. He's not Clarence Thomas. He is not Ward Connerly." Nor could anyone dismiss National Public Radio's respected Juan Williams when he emphatically endorsed Cosby's views in a 2006 book, *Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America—and What We Can Do About It.* When a longtime liberal like Williams embraces these ideas, something important is changing in the black mainstream—despite racial arsonist Al Sharpton's effort to demonize Williams as "the black Ann Coulter."

It requires explanation that black leaders don't mob Cosby with support, Williams points out, because he is so obviously right. *Of course* today's African-Americans have full civil rights and ample opportunity. Look at how immigrants from far-flung Ethiopia and Nigeria—no less black—succeed in their new land of opportunity. Moreover, notes Williams, Cosby's views mirror those of the civil rights greats of old. Booker T. Washington similarly urged education and self-reliance and cautioned that "we should not permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities." W. E. B. Du Bois, despite differences with Washington, shared his "goal of black self-reliance." Martin Luther King "said he wanted above all else to get black people to shed the idea that they did not control their destiny." And from the moment of emancipation, "education was a radical tool of liberation for black people so recently enslaved and purposely denied the chance to learn." From the founding of the Tuskegee Institute to Thurgood Marshall's *Brown* v. *Board* victory to James Meredith bravely entering Ole Miss in 1962, the right to education was central to the civil rights movement. As for out-of-wedlock childbearing, married couples headed 78 percent of black families in 1950, compared with 34 percent today.

In the 1960s, this can-do worldview changed. A vast transformation of American culture combined with the black-power movement and the War on Poverty to brew a toxic new orthodoxy among black leaders, who remain stuck in that era to this day. "Very few new ideas are allowed into this stifling echo chamber," Williams reports. Despite startling African-American progress in the intervening half-century, "the official message from civil rights leaders remains the same. Black people are victims of the system, and the government needs to increase social spending. . . . Even the most dysfunctional and criminal behavior among black people is not to be criticized by black leaders" but must "be denied and hidden in the name of protecting the image of blacks as disadvantaged, oppressed, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perpetually victimized." Dissent, and you're an "Uncle Tom and a sellout."

That half-century of progress, though, makes it hard to profess the orthodoxy in good faith. Some, such as Barack Obama's ex-pastor Jeremiah Wright, whose "black liberation theology" is pure sixties black-power political radicalism preserved in amber, still spout it sincerely. But Williams's view of most of today's black leaders recalls Eric Hoffer's dictum that great causes often start out as movements but degenerate into rackets. Today's leaders have made lucrative careers out of preaching a crippling ideology that ensures that they will never run out of poor blacks to agitate for. As Cosby quipped in one of his town meetings, "There are people who want you to remain in a hole, and they rejoice in your hopelessness because they have jobs mismanaging you."

"'There are people who . . . rejoice in your hopelessness because they have jobs mismanaging you.'"

Williams presents a rogues' gallery of African-American leaders who harm the people they claim to serve by blinding them to the opportunity all around them and stoking resentments that serve as excuses for wrongdoing. Jesse Jackson, "the unofficial president of black America," takes pride of place, with Al Sharpton as runner-up. Williams "detects a smell of extortion" about them; their main business, he says, is "staging phony protest marches for money." What blacks has Jackson benefited, except for two of his sons, whom his pressure tactics helped win a multi-million-dollar beer distributorship? Sharpton, Williams thinks, is lower still: he took a campaign contribution from a GOP operative who aimed to weaken the Democrats by keeping so polarizing a figure in their 2004 presidential primary.

When black politicians actually have won power, their politics of victimhood has often proved a rationale for not even trying to help the black masses but rather for decrying the white racism that supposedly causes their plight. Congresswoman Maxine Waters, for instance, spewed charges of racism to block officials from reforming a dysfunctional (and now closed) Los Angeles hospital that had become a high-paying jobs program for some blacks but whose poor care was harming its many black patients. Mayors Sharpe James of Newark and Marion Barry of Washington, Williams says, "saw political opportunity in making themselves masters of large pools of black people dependent on state and federal poverty programs." The money flowed in, mayoral aides stole it and went to jail, the schools got worse, crime festered, and finally prosecutors nailed James himself for rigging the sale of city property to enrich his mistress. By contrast, Cory Booker, James's successor, is (so to speak) the Bill Cosby of urban governance, exemplifying the right way forward for African-American pols.

If black leaders really wanted to help the black poor, Williams argues, they'd combat the "cultural belief that being 'authentically black' does not allow for high quality intellectual engagement in school," as columnist Joseph H. Brown put it. They'd demand radical school reform, including vouchers. It's a hopeful sign, Williams thinks, that *New York Times* editorialist Brent Staples, normally part of black orthodoxy's amen choir, has declared that if the civil rights establishment doesn't push hard for real school reform, even if it "would discomfort the teachers among its supporters, . . . it will inevitably be viewed as having missed the most important civil rights battle of the last half-century."

If black leaders really wanted to help the black poor, they'd stop decrying "police brutality and the increasing number of black people in jail" and focus instead "on having black people take personal responsibility for the exorbitant amount

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

C M BATTEY/GETTY IMAGES

Bill Cosby has picked up the standard of great civil rights leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois, above, . . .

of crime committed by black people against other black people" (which accounts for the exorbitant number of African-Americans in jail). But they don't. As Cosby pointed out to Williams, the NAACP has its headquarters in murder-ridden Baltimore, but "I've never once heard the NAACP say, 'Let's do something about this.'" Indeed, Williams notes, "they never marched or organized, or even criticized the criminals." Nor did they exhort poor black people to stop smoking crack.

But black crime devastates African-American communities. Residents live with "a sense of an enemy within. That enemy is a neighbor, a friend, possibly a child, any of whom is capable of robbing or assaulting them." In some cities, like Baltimore, drug dealers still terrorize entire neighborhoods, which resemble Sadr City. The thugs are as vicious as Sadr City militiamen, too. Williams tells of a Baltimore woman who testified against drug dealers operating outside her house in 2002. The next day, gangbangers firebombed her house, though she managed to put out the flames. Two weeks later, they firebombed her house again, this time kicking in the front door and dousing the staircase with gasoline, incinerating the woman, her husband, and their five kids. As she was dying, the woman fruitlessly screamed, "Help me get my children out!"

Even as old-style racism fades, Williams says, the black-crime epidemic is incubating a new racism. The crime "gives credence to the racist stereotype of black people, especially young black men, as a race of marauding, jobless thugs"—a stereotype that even Jesse Jackson shares. "There is nothing so painful to me at this stage of my life," Jackson said in 1993, "than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery and then look around and see somebody white and feel relieved." This grim development makes it all the more urgent for black leaders to say that "the black criminal is no friend of black progress."

So now imagine one of Bill Cosby's "sweet beautiful things born by nature—raised by no one"—grown to teen-age, filled with rage and buried sorrow at abandonment by his father and emotional abandonment, or worse, by his mother. Imagine that his mother never nurtured his basic language and cognitive skills, or properly disciplined and encouraged him, in his crucial first five years, so that learning and even sitting still in school have been hard for him. No respected civil rights group has used its moral capital to demand school reform that could give him the structured, rigorous teaching he especially needs. Almost no national black celebrity—until Cosby—has come into his

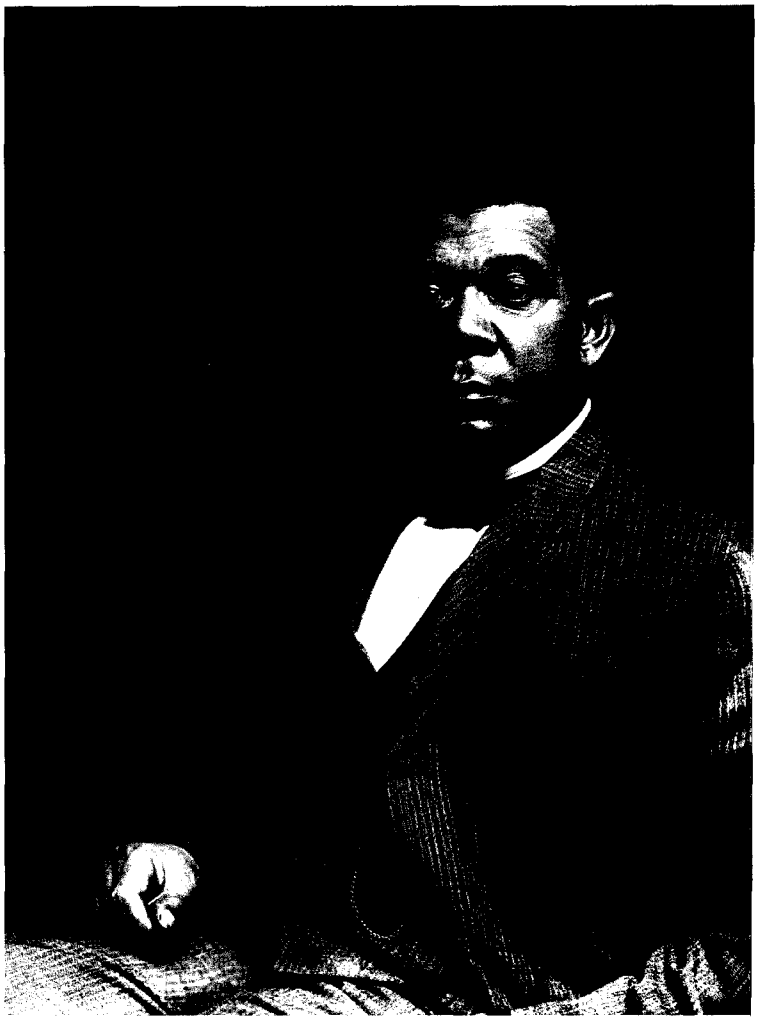
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neighborhood exhorting him to stay in school and work hard, because he could become a physical therapy assistant, say, or a car mechanic, starting at $35,000 to $50,000 a year. No reverend has come down from his pulpit to lead a march against the drug dealers and gangbangers who infest his neighborhood.

Instead, whenever a cop accidentally shoots an unarmed African-American, he hears of Al Sharpton leading a rent-a-demonstration, chanting, "No justice, no peace," a motley relic of black-power radicalism, which keeps distrust of the police alive in neighborhoods that, to be livable, need policing more than most. Come election time, perhaps he hears a local pol or campaign worker rail against racism and demand more government money. He hears his elders rage against the stinginess of the welfare office and the injustice of the Man, a convenient outlet for a deeper anger about more personal injustice and deprivation.

But most of all, he hears rap. Pumped out from CDs, videos, and television (especially Black Entertainment Television), which black kids watch even more excessively than white kids, "nihilistic glorifications of 'thug life'" and celebrations of gangbangers, drug dealers, and pimps "as black heroes" constantly wash over him, says Williams. "Black rappers, dressed for every video in convict style, posturing with menacing faces, hands flashing gang signals, their heads wrapped in prison-issue do-rags, pants hanging down in the convict style, and gangland tattoos covering their bodies" do their part "to promote black identity as the criminals' identity." Rap, says Williams, markets the idea that "violence, murder, and self-hatred" are "true blackness—authentic black identity." It is "an open sewer throwing up the idea that black men are most genuine, most in touch with their power, when they are getting vengeance with a gun in hand."

We know that this message reaches its listeners, says Williams, when we see ghetto kids "dress like rappers . . . and act hard-core, using *nigger*, cursing, and fighting on the way to school, in school, and after school—assuming they are still in school." And we know it as well from the crime statistics.



CORBIS

. . . and the Tuskegee Institute's first chief, Booker T. Washington, who both stressed black self-reliance.

We know that rap's message about sex also hits home. Its cartoon-simple sentiment, says Williams: "All black women are sexually crazed, lack discrimination about men, and deserve to be treated as mindless bitches—dogs." In rap, Cosby once said, there is "nothing about I care for you, nothing about may I go for a walk with you . . . just I'm hot, I'm leaking, I'm dripping, come on, and I know you want it too"—or, as the title of one rap song has it, "Face Down, Ass Up,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

C'mon." There is something tragic, Williams says, about poor black girls "trying to find a way to feel good about their identity in a culture that gives little reinforcement to black women" being asked to dance to music that describes them as whores and bitches. "Rap's pumped up message to them is to get naked and shake it before giving it up to do the wild thing," he says. And many will do just that, bearing another generation of doomed innocents, who, despite the evil done them, grow up to be responsible for their own acts.

Of course, white kids listen to this music and see these videos, too, including kids who will grow up to be corporate America's bosses, and it affects the way they see black people, Williams says. They will come away with an image of black women as indiscriminate sluts, and black men, as African-American journalist Stanley Crouch puts it, as "monkey-moving, gold-chain-wearing, illiteracy-spouting, penis-pulling, sullen, combative buffoons." "Who would hire such a person?" Williams asks. "Who would want to live next to them?" This $4-billion-a-year industry, in which blacks are the performers, the designers, and many of the executives, presents African-Americans to the entire world in terms the Ku Klux Klan would use. Where are the civil rights leaders?

Williams's rogues' gallery includes—beside the stuck-in-the-sixties civil rights pooh-bahs, the racketeering reverends, the corrupt pols, and the exploitative rappers—also the nutty black-studies professors. A typical specimen, Georgetown prof Michael Eric Dyson, leaped into the Cosby debate in 2005 with *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* Dyson's attack, just the old victimology with a twenty-first-century twist, usefully underscores how specious and destructive that orthodoxy is. It also calls into question academe's push for the black "perspective" on its faculties, when that perspective is by definition the harmful one of victimhood and grievance.

Cosby's "blaming of the poor," Dyson says, is the traditional attitude of an African-American elite "fatally obsessed with white approval" and persuaded that an embrace of "Victorian values" will win "acceptance from the white majority." But the "pathologies" of the poor subvert their efforts, "ruining the reputation of the race." And so, beginning long ago, the black aristocracy began "a program of moral rebuke disguised as social uplift." Like Cosby, "they policed poor black communities from the . . . lectern," trying to impose on them "temperance, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals."

But they were wrong to think that "if only the poor were willing to work harder, act better, get educated, stay out of jail and parent more effectively, their problems would go away." It is not the personal behavior of the black poor but American society's "structural barriers," including the "export of jobs and ongoing racial stigma," that prevent blacks from rising. Similar "structural barriers" hold black kids back educationally. While the suburbs boast "$60-million schools with state-of-the-art technology, . . . inner-city schools fight desperately for funding," ensuring that "our children will continue to spiral down stairwells of suffering and oppression."

Even black crime has a structural component, since society has consigned the black poor to "conditions that offer them limited options, which often, yes, lead to poor choices"—so that society is partly to blame. Moreover, the war on drugs "is a war on black and brown people," and innovations in "policing measures (leading eventually to racial profiling) . . . greatly increased the odds that blacks would do serious time for nonviolent and often first-time offenses"—assertions with an untruth in almost every word. But white America has a reason for its war on minorities. "The prison-industrial complex literally provides white economic opportunity across class strata," Dyson explains. "Big money is at stake when it comes to making a crucial choice: to support blacks at the state university or the state penitentiary." Cosby's call for personal responsibility is thus doubly cruel: it asks the black poor to feel undeserved blame for their own victimization, while excusing whites from coming to their rescue.

Dyson spruces up the old-style victimology with a dash of hip, multiculti relativism. In

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thinking he has achieved a universal humanity beyond race, because the virtues he embodies are supposedly universal, Cosby has made an error that most whites and many blacks (thanks to white dominance) make, says Dyson: that "white identity [is] normative, and hence universal." But for black people to aspire to that identity requires "unhealthy doses of self-abnegation" and "conscious rejection of the identity they have inherited or invented."

Much better, says Dyson, for black people to "'keep it real,' which often means honoring the ghetto roots of black identity." African-Americans should value the "elements of mass black culture that enable black folk to resist oppression, transcend their suffering and transform their pain." Hence Cosby is wrong to reject black English—which "grows out of the fierce linguisticality of black existence, the insistence by blacks of carving a speech of their own"—and to scoff at supposedly African names like "Shaniqua, Shaligua, Mohammed." Though such names may be African "only in that they reflected flair and creativity," Dyson says, the important thing is that they recall "the freedom to name themselves" that blacks asserted under slavery, "refusing to tie their identities to the names their owners gave them."

Cosby is at his most wrong, though, Dyson says, in his hatred of rap, which expresses the authentically black "gangsta" belief that "the lifestyle and ideology of the outlaw, the rebel and the bandit challenge the corrupt norms of the state, the government, and the rule of law in society." So too with hip-hop fashion, with its "hats on backward, pants down around the crack" that Cosby deplored in his speech. "Fashion in black urban circles rises to performance art," Dyson tells us. "The more daring their fashions, the less cooperative they are with bourgeois elegance, and the more they undermine bland conformism, the more likely black youth are to understand their bodies as battlefields of fierce moral contest." Do their pants hang low? "This may be understood as *sympathy dress*," an "overidentification" with relatives "who may have been caught up in a bloody urban drama. . . . It is a way of reclaiming the body of a loved one from its demobilized confinement and granting it, vicariously, the freedom to walk on the streets from which it has been removed." And in truth, "many black youth who wear baggy pants may feel that they are already in prison, at least one of perception, built by the white mainstream and by their dismissive, demeaning elders." Thus does the idle sophistry of armchair elites come to ratify cultural patterns once recognized as fatal to the poor.

"White kids listen to this music and see these videos, too, and it affects the way they see black people, Williams says."

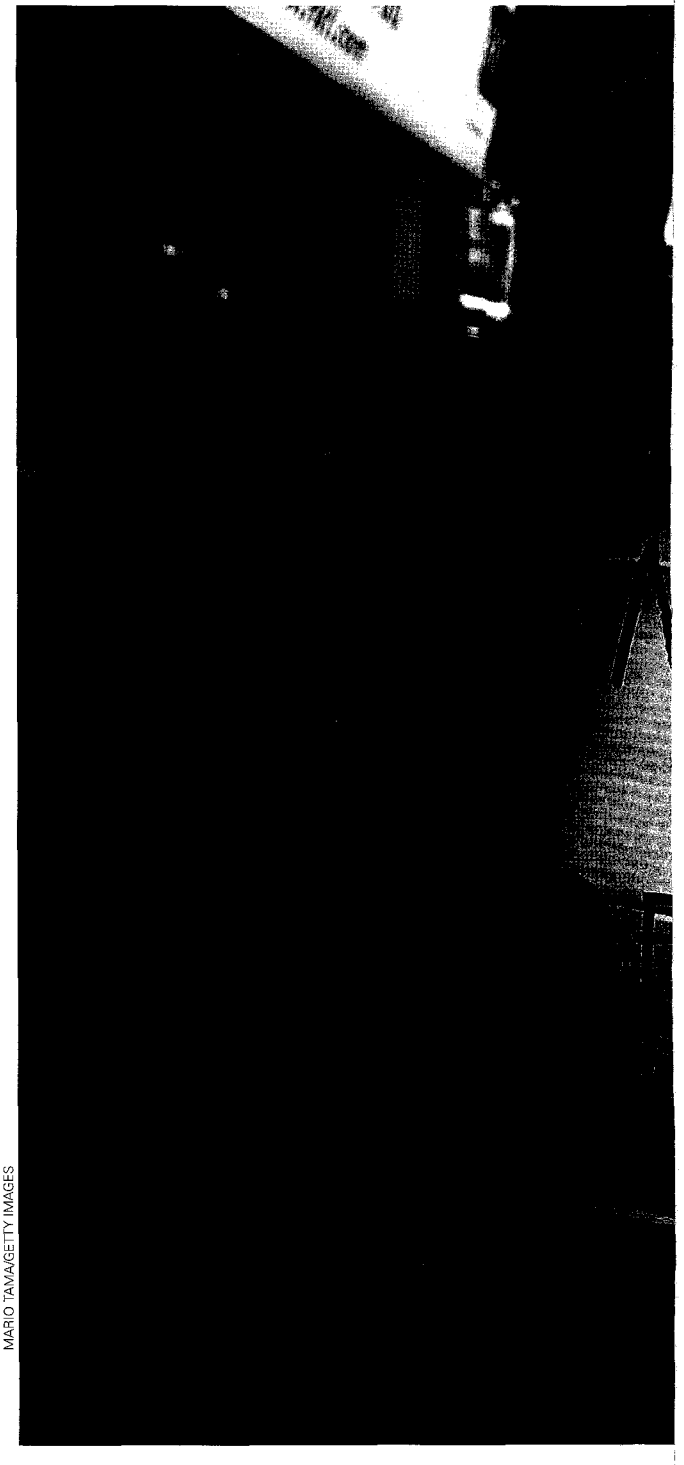
The debate raging throughout black America is the more historic because it is also raging within the soul of America's first black presidential nominee. Which Obama will prevail? The old-orthodoxy Obama, who sat for 20 years listening to Reverend Wright saying "God damn America" and claiming that the government purposely infected the ghetto with AIDS, who brought his daughters to hear him, and who named a book after one of his sermons? The Obama whose wife, in her grievances and resentments, her whine that America is "just downright mean," uncannily embodies the black bourgeois attitudes that Ellis Cose described 15 years ago as *The Rage of a Privileged Class*? Or will it be the Obama who will truly usher in the age of postracial politics, as he seemed to promise when he first emerged as so fresh and attractive a candidate? The Obama who marked Father's Day with a moving speech on black America's need for responsible fathers that Bill Cosby would cheer?

At the very least, his nomination, as he himself has said, shows how much progress black America has made. Let's hope the African-American majority will take the lesson to heart.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Professional Panhandling Plague

A new generation of shakedown artists hampers America's urban revival.



MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

Charlie's blunt approach to begging is in vogue across the country—and it actually works.

Steven Malanga

Barbara Bradley, an editor with the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, moved into the River City's reviving downtown about a year and a half ago, loving its "energy and enthusiasm." But a horde of invading panhandlers has cooled her enjoyment of city life. Earlier this year, she recalled in a recent column, as she showed some visitors around the neighborhood, "a big panhandler blocked the entrance to our parking area and demanded his toll." Now a nervous Bradley avoids certain downtown areas, locks her car when fueling up at local gas stations, and parks strategically, so that she can see beggars coming before getting out of her car. "When I hear

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

someone call out 'ma'am, ma'am' anywhere in downtown or midtown, I run."

She's not alone. Cities have overcome myriad obstacles in revitalizing their downtowns, from lousy transportation systems to tough competition from suburban shopping malls. But nearly 15 years after New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his police chief, William Bratton, vanquished Gotham's notorious squeegee men and brought aggressive panhandling under control, other cities are facing a new wave of "spangers" (that is, spare-change artists) who threaten their newfound prosperity by harassing residents, tourists, and businesses. Unlike their predecessors in the seventies and eighties, many of these new beggars aren't helpless victims or even homeless. Rather, they belong to a diverse and swelling community of street people who have made panhandling their calling.

Like most countries, America has always had its share of itinerant travelers, vagabonds, and hoboes. But panhandling became a more pervasive and disturbing fact of urban life in the 1970s—a by-product of the explosion in homelessness that resulted from rising drug use and the closing of state-run mental institutions, which released scores of helpless psychiatric patients back into society. Though studies showed that only a small percentage of homeless people panhandled—mostly alcoholics and drug addicts seeking their next fix—the sheer numbers of street people still meant lots of beggars. By the crack epidemic's late-eighties peak, New York City in particular was home to a massive panhandling presence. A 1988 survey by New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority found that 80 percent of subway riders disliked the constant harassment. "I was raised never to pass a beggar by, but there are too many of them and I'm sick of it," one Manhattanite told the *New York Times*. "I feel like this is becoming beggar city."

The problem soon turned from irritating to alarming in "beggar city," as incidents of aggressive panhandling leading to violent crime began showing up regularly in the headlines. In 1988, an itinerant panhandler on Manhattan's Upper West Side murdered his girlfriend's three-year-old daughter, whose dead body he then stuffed into a baby carriage and took out on his rounds, along with the girl's still-living brother. A year later, an aggressive panhandler stabbed to death a 32-year-old computer engineer in a confrontation on West 114th Street in Manhattan. Shortly after, in the Bronx, an 18-year-old boy died from stab wounds inflicted by a panhandling immigrant who knew just four English words: "Give me a dollar!"

The escalation—and other cities faced it, too—shouldn't have been surprising. "If the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying passersby . . . it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if a mugging actually takes place," wrote political scientist James Q. Wilson. One change in policing that had contributed to the growing disorder, observed Wilson, was curtailing foot patrols in favor of squad cars. In the past, an officer on the beat would discourage panhandlers; now he just drove on by.

New York, fed up with the disorder, began to crack down on panhandling in the early nineties. The effort started in the subways, spearheaded by the Bratton-led Metropolitan Transit Authority police, who combined policing with outreach efforts for homeless beggars willing to come in off the streets. The cleanup continued when Bratton became Giuliani's first police commissioner in 1994 and took on the squeegee men—insistent panhandlers who intimidated Manhattan drivers by washing their car windows and then demanding payment. After a study by criminologist George Kelling found that three-quarters of the squeegee men weren't homeless and that half had felony records, cops began arresting them for blocking traffic. That put an end to the shakedowns in a matter of weeks.

The city then extended the anti-panhandling campaign to other parts of the city, including beggar-dominated Times Square. Central to the crackdown was the Midtown Community Court, an experimental judicial body to which police could drag quality-of-life arrestees the very day

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they issued citations. Working with social-services providers who offered help to those needing it, the court acted with lightning speed, usually giving community-service sentences to those willing to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges, so that someone arrested for panhandling in the morning could be cleaning the neighborhood by the afternoon. The immediate results gave police a strong incentive to enforce the city's long-moribund quality-of-life statutes; previously, if an officer issued a quality-of-life citation, the panhandler had a month or longer to respond to the summons and often didn't show up in court on the appointed day. As with the subways and the squeegee men, the campaign was a huge success.

Other cities, following New York's lead, worked to reduce their own (much less severe) panhandling blight during the nineties—adopting community courts, forcing beggars to register for licenses (which discouraged them), and passing new anti-panhandling laws. These measures, though rarely as tough as Gotham's, helped spark new development and interest in downtown districts across the country.

"Police in Coos Bay, Oregon, found that local panhandlers were taking in as much as $300 a day."

But over the last several years, the urban resurgence has proved an irresistible draw to a new generation of spangers. And while New York City's aggressive emphasis on quality-of-life policing under two successive mayors has kept them at bay, less vigilant cities have been overwhelmed. Indeed, panhandling is epidemic in many places—from cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Austin, Memphis, Orlando, and Albuquerque to smaller college towns like Berkeley. "People in New York would be shocked at what one encounters in other cities these days, where the panhandling can be very intimidating," says Daniel Biederman, a cofounder of three business improvement districts in Manhattan, including the Grand Central Partnership, which grappled effectively with homelessness in the city's historic train station in the early 1990s. "Panhandling has gotten especially bad in cities that have a reputation for being liberal and tolerant. They have tried to be open-minded, but now many of them see the problem as out of control."

A big part of the cities' woes is the professionalization of panhandling. The old type of panhandler—a mentally impaired or disabled homeless person trying to scrape together a few bucks for a meal—is giving way to the full-time spanger who supports himself through a combination of begging, working at odd jobs, and other sources, like government assistance from disability payments. Some full-time panhandlers are kids—"road warriors" who have largely dropped out of society and drift from town to town, often "couch surfing" at friends' homes, or "street loiterers" who daily make their way downtown from the suburbs where they live. Some, like New Yorker Steve Baker, have turned begging into a full-time job. "If you're inside a bank, you're a doorman," he says from his perch inside a bank lobby. "You're not gonna rob from nobody or steal from nobody—you come in here and make a job for yourself."

People's generosity encourages the begging. About four out of ten Denver residents gave to panhandlers, city officials determined several years ago, anteing up an estimated $4.6 million a year. Anecdotal surveys by journalists and police, and even testimony by panhandlers themselves, suggest that begging can yield anywhere from $20 to $100 a day—though police in Coos Bay, Oregon, found that local panhandlers were taking in as much as $300 a day in a Wal-Mart parking lot. "A panhandler could make thirty to forty thousand dollars a year, tax-free money," Baker says. In Memphis, a local FOX News reporter, Jason Carter, donned old clothes and hit the streets earlier this year, earning about $10 an hour. "Just the quasi-appearance of being homeless filled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Many full-time "spangers" are peripatetic youths, moving from downtown to downtown plying their trade.

my cup," Carter observed. That all the money is beyond the tax man's clutches adds to the allure of professional panhandling.

Carter prepared for his stint on the street by surfing the Internet, where a variety of websites dispense panhandling advice. NeedCom,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RUSS BUTNER

for example—subtitled "Market Research for Panhandlers"—offers tips from Baker and other pros on how to hustle. The website's developer, Cathy Davies, wants it to get people "thinking about panhandling as a realistic economic activity, rather than thinking that panhandlers are lazy or don't work very hard."

The rise of online panhandling advice helps explain why panhandlers and "sign flyers"—beggars who use signs to solicit donations—exhibit remarkably similar methods around the country. Currently, the direct, humorous approach is in vogue. That's why in many cities today you'll hear some version of: "I won't lie to you, I need a drink." Panhandlers also report that asking for specific amounts of money lends credibility to pitches. "I need 43 more cents to get a cup of coffee," a panhandler will declare; some people will give exactly that much, while others will simply hand over a buck.

If it seems unlikely that a homeless person would surf the Web for advice on how to panhandle, that's exactly the point: many aren't homeless and are lying about their circumstances. A reporter for KUTV in Salt Lake City followed and filmed panhandlers for several months, documenting their scams. One twentysomething woman wielded a sign informing people that she was homeless and needed a bus ticket back to Seattle. The reporter followed her one day, however, and discovered that she lived in a nearby suburb. Confronted by the reporter, the woman explained away her deception: "I don't say anything to anybody. I hold this sign. I don't make anybody give me money." Her story isn't unique: homeless advocate Pamela Atkinson told KUTV that some 70 percent of panhandlers in Salt Lake City aren't describing their situations accurately.

Like their counterparts back in the eighties, some spangers refuse to take no for an answer. Aggressive begging has grown so common in Memphis that a group of residents, members of an online forum called Handling-Panhandling, have begun photographing those who act in a threatening manner, seeking to help police catch those who violate the law. "One of the guys we photographed for the Handling-Panhandling group last summer was obviously a loose cannon," forum host Paul Ryburn writes. "When employees of a Beale Street restaurant asked him to stop begging in front of their door, he threatened to stab them."

Reports of similar incidents are on the increase in many cities. A pizzeria manager in Columbus, Ohio, told the *Columbus Dispatch* earlier this year that panhandlers were entering the store asking for money, then following women back to their cars to scare them into giving it. "One of the bums threatened to stab me when I asked them to leave two women alone," the restaurateur added. In Orlando, panhandlers have started entering downtown offices and asking receptionists for money, prompting businesses to lock the doors. San Francisco police have identified 39 beggars who have received five or more citations for aggressive panhandling, racking up a total of 447 citations. Tourist guidebooks and online sites are replete with warnings from travelers. A business visitor to Nashville, sharing his experiences on Fodor.com, writes: "Every day I was there I was not just approached but grabbed or touched by folks asking for money." A traveler to San Francisco, describing his trip on Virtualtourist.com, warns prospective tourists about the pervasiveness of persistent beggars: "If you come to San Francisco and are not hit up for change, you have spent too much time in your hotel room."

Widespread begging bears much of the blame for lingering public impressions that downtowns remain unsafe, even in places like Minneapolis, where crime has fallen. In a survey last year,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than a fifth of Minneapolis's downtown workers called the area "extremely unsafe" in the evening, largely because of extensive panhandling (nine out of ten downtown workers report getting asked for money at least several times a month). Aggressive beggars have tried to extort cash from waitresses at local restaurants by threatening to harass customers. Families visiting downtown report panhandlers following them down the street and cursing at them if they refuse to give, according to the head of the Downtown Council, a local business group. The bullying shakedowns are having an economic effect on the city: some firms have balked at renewing leases. Downtown business owners in Nashville now rank panhandling as their Number One problem.

In St. Louis, another city battling perceptions that it's dangerous, two-thirds of respondents to an online poll by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* said that they'd encountered aggressive panhandling. Matt Kastner, a real-estate agent who has moved back to St. Louis from the suburbs, believes that panhandlers are perpetrating much of the minor crime—such as car break-ins—that plagues parts of St. Louis. Many solicit him on the city's roads. "They'll come right at the car as you're getting off an exit ramp," he says. "I'm afraid one of these days I'm going to hit one of them." Kastner's fears aren't misplaced: in Austin, where persistent begging has given new meaning to the term "Texas panhandle," the police chief noted last August that more than a third of the people killed in traffic accidents that year had been cited for begging in the past.

Confronting the new panhandling plague, many cities have been hamstrung by local factors that have made it hard to attack the problem in the aggressive, enforcement-driven New York style. Some places, for instance, never transformed their police forces to emphasize quality-of-life crime and the importance of the cop on the beat. Certain states, such as California, prohibit community courts for misdemeanors. And sometimes a city's political tradition is so liberal that the notion of cracking down at all is anathema. When Seattle city attorney Mark Sidran proposed muscular anti-panhandling restrictions in the early 1990s, protesters burned him in effigy; today, despite complaints from visitors, Seattle pols still have no real plans to deal with the new wave of panhandling. Anti-panhandling efforts in Oregon and other states also have run into legal obstacles from state courts, which have broadly interpreted begging as a protected form of free speech and shot down new laws curtailing it.

Still, some locales, while not going to New York's lengths, are experimenting with innovative ways to curb panhandling. Orlando allows begging only in "panhandling zones," demarcated by blue boxes painted on the sidewalks in several locations. A more common response has been to educate the public about panhandling and to offer alternative ways to help those who really need it. The Nashville Downtown Partnership, for instance, has launched a publicity campaign, "Please Help, Don't Give," which explains through posters that money given to panhandlers often supports drug and alcohol addictions. The partnership asks people to donate instead to organizations that provide local services.

Denver's anti-panhandling initiative seems particularly promising. The city has turned 86 old, unused parking meters into donation boxes and placed them around downtown. The meters allow people to give directly on the street, where they're likely to encounter panhandlers, assuring donors that their money will go to programs to assist the truly needy. "$1.50 provides a meal for a homeless person," the meter proclaims. Between donations and corporate sponsorship, the meter program is generating about $100,000 a year, distributed to local groups to provide housing, job training, and other services, says Jamie Van Leeuwen, head of the city's homelessness-combating Road Home program. The meter initiative is also deterring spanging—the city estimates that it's down a striking 90 percent. "Panhandling and homelessness are not synonymous," says Van Leeuwen. "Our homeless underscore that just because they are homeless, that does not mean that they panhandle." Several cities are already copying the Denver initiative, including

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chattanooga, which calls its version "The Art of Change," and Minneapolis; others, like Las Vegas, are considering it.

Cities are also coming up with new anti-panhandling legislation designed to pass muster in the courts. Several cities have passed "sit, lie" ordinances, for example, which say nothing about panhandling but ban people from sitting or lying on streets and sidewalks. Portland officials proposed a "sit, lie" law and then won over local homeless advocates by promising new spending on services for the truly needy. "In Portland, only about 10 percent of the people loitering on downtown streets and begging during the day were homeless," says Mike Kuykendall, president of the city's downtown business improvement district. He credits the anti-panhandling initiative with playing a part in a 29 percent decline in street crime downtown over the last three years.

"In St. Louis, two-thirds of respondents to an online poll said that they'd encountered aggressive panhandling."

Similarly, several cities and smaller communities have banned motorists from giving to beggars, framing the legislation as safety ordinances. Courts have also upheld laws that prohibit beggars from touching people without their consent, intentionally blocking their path, and using obscene or abusive language.

Yet even as cities experiment with new approaches, those traditionally opposed to restrictions on panhandling are fighting back—notably, civil liberties groups and some homeless advocates, who oppose any actions that might criminalize conduct by even a minority of the homeless. In 2003, San Francisco residents overwhelmingly passed a ballot proposition authored by then-supervisor (and now mayor) Gavin Newsom outlawing in-your-face panhandling. But the ordinance has been ineffective because scores of volunteer lawyers, many from the city's biggest law firms, have fought every citation. People cited for panhandling don't even need to appear in court. They simply drop their citations in boxes at various advocacy groups, and the lawyers pick them up and appear in court, where judges have ruled that cops must file lengthy reports in order to get a conviction. The courts are dismissing about 85 percent of all tickets handed out under the ordinance, frustrating police, prosecutors, politicians, and residents who voted for it. "If you had been here several years ago, before the ordinance passed, and came back today, you wouldn't see a difference in the level of panhandling. There's as much as ever," says supervisor Sean Elsbernd.

Such battles between civil libertarians and those who want to limit panhandling remain common. Austin civil rights advocates got the city's ban on panhandling along roadsides overturned; the court ruled that the city hadn't adequately demonstrated that panhandling was a safety issue. Even New York City, which has long been able to stave off court challenges to its panhandling ordinance, isn't immune. A local judge has ruled that police have sometimes overstepped the bounds of the city's aggressive panhandling legislation and arrested people for peaceful solicitation. Last year, a court awarded $100,000 to a beggar arrested eight times in the Bronx.

But there's no doubt that some cities have been more effective than others at building anti-panhandling campaigns. "I recently visited New York City and was shocked to discover that for a city with ten times our population, it has one tenth as many beggars," one San Franciscan wrote on the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s website. "The few I did see sat silently with their signs and said nothing. I didn't witness a single instance of aggressive panhandling. The reason for this? The city passed laws against such conduct and has enforced those laws. If it can work over there, it can work here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Houston, New York Has a Problem

The southern city welcomes the middle class; heavily regulated and expensive Gotham drives it away.

Edward L. Glaeser

New Yorkers are rightly proud of their city's renaissance over the last two decades, but when it comes to growth, Gotham pales beside Houston. Between 2000 and 2007, the New York region grew by just 2.7 percent, while greater Houston—the country's sixth-largest metropolitan area—grew by 19.4 percent, expanding from 4.7 to 5.6 million people. To East Coast urbanites, Houston's appeal must be mysterious: the city isn't all that economically productive—earnings per employee in Manhattan are almost double those in Houston—and its climate is unpleasant, with stultifying humidity and more days with temperatures exceeding 90 degrees than in any other large American city. So if those two major factors in urban growth don't explain Houston's success, what does?

Houston's great advantage, it turns out, is its ability to provide affordable living for middle-income Americans, something that is increasingly hard to achieve in the Big Apple. That Houston is a middle-class city is mirrored in the nature of its economy. Both greater Houston and Manhattan have about 2 million employees. In Manhattan, almost 600,000 of them work in the idea-intensive sectors of finance, insurance, and professional services; only 2 percent are in manufacturing, and fewer than that in construction. Finance increasingly drives New York City's economy as a whole. By contrast, Houston is a manufacturing powerhouse that makes machinery, food products, and electronics, with a retail sector twice the size of Manhattan's and lots of middle-class jobs.

Housing prices are the most important part of Houston's recipe for middle-class affordability. In Gotham, the extraordinarily high housing costs aren't a problem for the hyper-rich. With enough money, you can live in a spacious aerie overlooking Central Park, shop at Barney's, eat at Le Bernardin, and send your children to Brearley or Dalton. The abundance of poorer immigrant New Yorkers, in turn, tells us that for people simply seeking a lifestyle that beats rural Brazil, the city's many entry-level service-sector jobs, wide array of social services, and extensive public transportation can offset high apartment prices.

But what if, like most Americans, you are neither a partner at Goldman nor a penniless immigrant? Consider an average American family with skills that put them in the middle of the U.S. income distribution—nurses, sales representatives, retail managers—and aspirations to a middle-class lifestyle. What kind of life will such people lead in Houston and New York City, respectively?

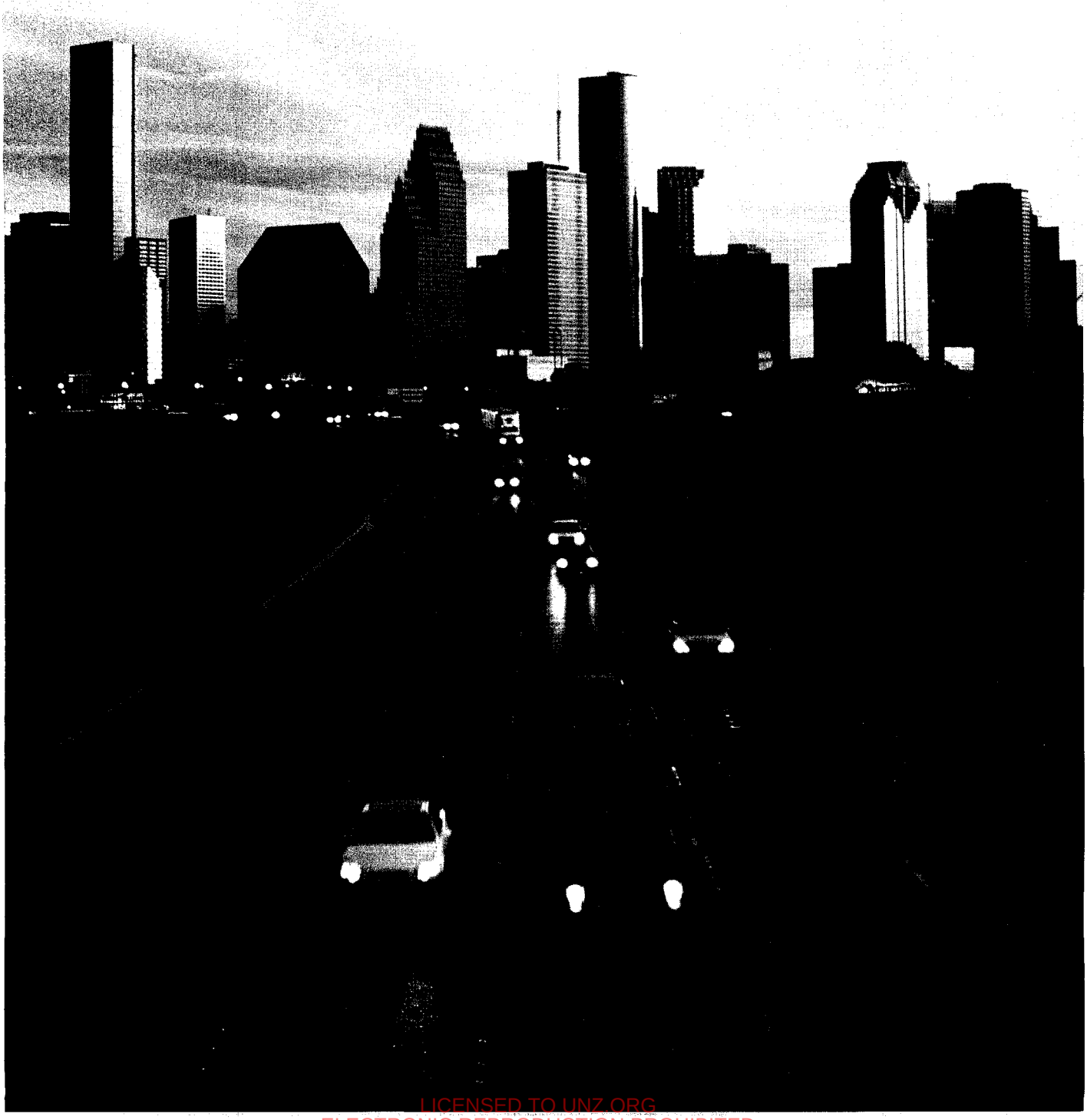
For starters, they'll probably earn less in Houston, though not as much less as you might think. In the 2000 U.S. Census, the typical registered nurse made $50,000 in New York and $40,000 in Houston. A retail manager earned $28,000 in New York and $27,800 in Houston. Let's be generous to New York and assume that our middle-income family would earn $70,000 there but just $60,000 in Houston.

If our Houston family's income is lower, however, its housing costs are *much* lower. In 2006,

Houstonians zoom home from work in 27 air-conditioned minutes, . . .

LOWELL GEORGIA/CORBIS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

residents of Harris County, the 4-million-person area that includes Houston, told the census that the average owner-occupied housing unit was worth $126,000. Residents valued about 80 percent of the homes in the county at less than $200,000. The National Association of Realtors gives $150,000 as the median price of recent Houston home sales; though NAR figures don't always accurately reflect average home prices, they do capture the prices of newer, often higher-quality, housing.

To understand what kind of houses these are, go house-hunting on the Web. In Houston, you'll find a lot of nice places listing for $175,000, and they'll probably sell for about 10 percent less, or $160,000. These are relatively new houses, often with four or more bedrooms. Some have over 3,000 square feet of living space, swimming pools, and plenty of mahogany and leaded glass. Almost all seem to be in pleasant neighborhoods—a few are even in gated communities. The lots tend to be modest, about one-fifth of an acre, but that still leaves plenty of room for the kids to play. For a family that has about $35,000 available for a down payment, basic housing costs—that is, mortgage payments—would be about $9,200 a year.

The average home price in New York City is dramatically higher. In 2006, the census put it at $496,000, and $787,900 in Manhattan—way out of reach for a family earning $70,000 a year. There are cheaper options: a perfectly pleasant Staten Island home with three bedrooms and two baths for $340,000, for instance. These houses don't have the amenities you would find in new Houston houses, but they offer 2,000 square feet of living space. Alternatively, the family might purchase a condominium, with two or three bedrooms, in Queens—say, in Howard Beach or Far Rockaway. Even for the Staten Island option, a family making the same $35,000 down payment would face basic housing costs of about $24,000 a year.

You thus get much more house in Houston and pay a lot less for it. This chasm would be just as big if you compared Houston with Los Angeles, where the average house price is a whopping $613,000. Small wonder Houston looks so good to middle-class Americans.

It looks even better once you take taxes into account. Federal taxes are roughly equal for the two families: about $7,000 per year. But under the Texas constitution, to enact a state income tax requires approval by statewide referendum—and two-thirds of the revenues generated by such a tax, if passed, must go toward reducing other taxes. As a result, Texas doesn't have any state income taxes. (Nor, for that matter, does it have any city income taxes.) Houston residents do have to pay property taxes, which come to about $4,800 for a $160,000 home. In New York City, not only would a middle-class family have to pay local property taxes, probably about $3,400; they would also have to pay state and city income taxes—adding another $4,000 or so to their tax burden, depending on deductions and other factors. State and local levies thus add about $2,600 to the cost of living in New York.

Ah, but doesn't it cost a lot more to get around sprawling Houston? The Houstonians must have two cars: the poor public-transit system leaves them no other choice. American families earning $60,000 typically spend about $8,500 a year on transportation—and sure enough, in Houston, that's sufficient (barely) to cover gas, insurance, and payments on two relatively inexpensive cars. The New Yorkers could save a lot by giving up on cars altogether and relying solely on Gotham's extensive network of buses and subways, but on Staten Island or in outer Queens, that would mean a significant lifestyle cost. Family members would have to walk to the grocery store and rely on taxis for other trips. A more reasonable approach would be to have one car for local trips and use public transit to get to work. With a public-transit bill of $80 per month, a fair guess is that the New York family will end up spending about $3,000 less per year than the Houstonians on getting around.

Just as with housing, however, there's a significant difference in the *quality* of transportation in Houston and New York. In Houston, the middle-class breadwinner likely will drive an air-conditioned car from an air-conditioned home to an air-conditioned workplace, and take 27.4 minutes to do it, on average. Commuting via New York public transit is more complicated. If

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you live in Queens, the average commute to midtown Manhattan (if that's where you work, as we'll say) is 42 minutes, and longer if you're coming from Far Rockaway. From Staten Island, the average commute is 44 minutes—and often something of a triathlon, with bus, ferry, and subway stages. Our middle-class New York commuter thus spends at least 120 more hours in transit per year than does his Houston counterpart. And except perhaps for the ones spent on the ferry, none of those hours is as agreeable as sitting in an air-conditioned car listening to the radio.

Will rising oil prices eat away Houston's cost advantages? While there's no question that more expensive crude favors dense New York, the impact of paying more at the pump is likely to be modest. If the Houston residents buy 500 more gallons of gas per year than the New Yorkers, and if the price of gas jumps by $3 a gallon, then the price of Houston living will increase by $1,500. This is a real cost, but it doesn't come close to evening the playing field. Further, the Houston family could always drive a 50-miles-to-the-gallon hybrid, which would let them buy only 400 gallons of gas to drive 20,000 miles. Big-city boosters may like to think that rising gas prices will end suburban sprawl, but a far more likely response to expensive oil is a large switch to more fuel-efficient cars.

After housing, taxes, and transportation, the New Yorkers have $26,000 left. The Houston family has $30,500, and those dollars go a lot further than they would in New York. The American Chamber of Commerce produces local price indexes for various areas, including Houston and Queens (though not Staten Island). The overall price index for Queens is 150, which means that it costs 50 percent more to live there than it does in the average American locale. The price index for Houston is 88. If we exclude the areas that our two families have already paid for (housing and transportation) and average the remaining categories in the index (food, utilities, health, and miscellaneous), Queens is 24 percent more expensive than the average American area and Houston is 6 percent less expensive. Thus—again, after housing, taxes, and transportation—the Queens residents' real remainder is a little less than $21,000; the Houston family's is $32,200. The Houston family is effectively 53 percent richer and solidly in the middle class, with plenty of money for going out to dinner at Applebee's or taking vacations to San Antonio. The family on Staten Island or in Queens is straining constantly to make ends meet.

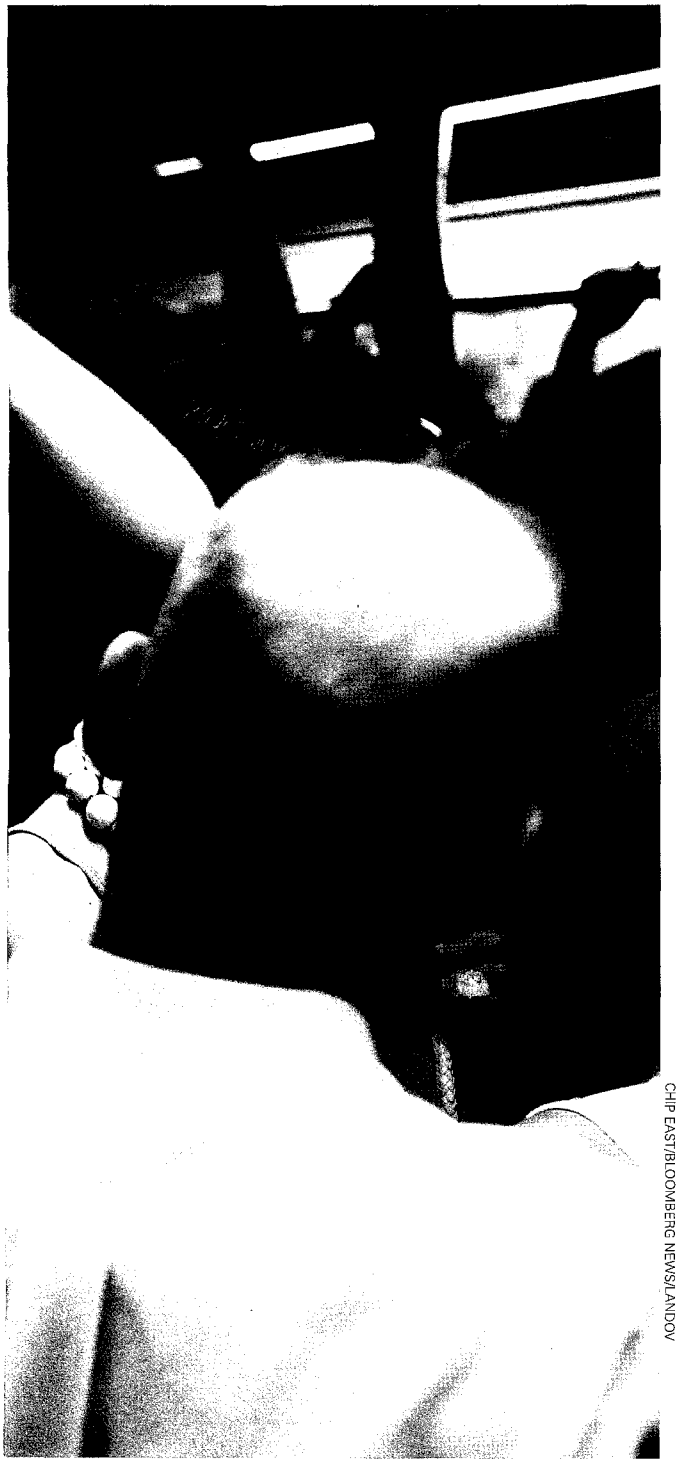
"Living in Houston on $60,000 a year means a high-quality, spacious home, low local taxes, and education options."

Don't forget education. Ordinary public schools would be comparable in Houston and on Staten Island, with average SAT scores of about 950. The Houston family, though, has the option of moving to a slightly more expensive school district, like Spring Branch, which has an average SAT score of 1070, better than that in many New York suburbs. The family could buy a decent home there for $200,000—a modest stretch. Finding a similarly better school in New York—unless the child in question were brilliant and got in to a really great place like Staten Island Technical School, where the SAT average is 1280—would require relocating to a distant and very expensive suburb.

True, New York boasts fantastic cultural advantages, hip downtown neighborhoods, and pleasures you can enjoy even if you don't have much cash in your pocket—museums, parks, architecture. But the fact remains that living in Houston on $60,000 a year means a high-quality, spacious home, an air-conditioned commute, low local taxes, education options, and a decent amount of spending money left over. Living in New York City on $70,000 a year means a smaller, older home, a long and arduous commute, higher local taxes, fewer educational alternatives, and scrimping every day. For many

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



CHIP EAST/BLOOMBERG NEWS/LANDOV

middle-class families, at least those with kids, the amenities will be no substitute for a more comfortable life. In a sense, the real surprise isn't that so many middle-income families are putting down roots in Houston (and in other fast-growing cities with similar characteristics, such as Atlanta and Phoenix); it's that any of them remain in New York.

Low taxes, decent schools, and a comfortable commute are important, but if the key factor making Houston a middle-class magnet is its plentiful and inexpensive housing, that raises the question: Why is it so cheap? The low cost of homes reflects the low cost of *supplying* homes in Texas. Building an "economy" 2,000-square-foot house in Houston costs about $120,000, and a slightly larger "standard" one about $150,000. Add a developer's profit and land costs, and you can figure that supplying a new middle-class home costs between $140,000 and $190,000. Since housing depreciates over time, it's possible to buy older houses below construction costs, and that's exactly what middle-class families are doing. Supplying housing in New York City costs much, much more—for a 1,500-square-foot apartment, well over $500,000 in construction costs alone.

Why is it so much more expensive in New York? Part of the reason is admittedly geographic: an old port on a narrow island can't grow outward, as Houston has, and the costs of building up—New York's fate, especially in Manhattan—will always be higher than those of building out. Yet there are places in the U.S. that look geographically like Houston but are as unaffordable as Manhattan—San José, California, for instance. And there are places that look more like Manhattan but are priced more like Houston: high-rise Chicago is a lot more affordable for middle-income people than is high-rise New York. These gaps tell us that housing prices mirror government policies as well as natural geography.

. . . while outer-borough New Yorkers heading to midtown Manhattan sweat through an average commute of three-quarters of an hour.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And the unavoidable fact is that New York makes it harder to build housing than Chicago does—and a lot harder than Houston does. The permitting process in Manhattan is an arduous, unpredictable, multiyear odyssey involving a dizzying array of regulations, environmental and otherwise, and a host of agencies. Then developers must deal with neighborhood activists and historical preservationists. Any effort to build in one of New York's more attractive, older communities would almost certainly face strong opposition from the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

A further obstacle: rent control. When other municipalities dropped rent control after World War II, New York clung to it, despite the fact that artificially reduced rents discourage people from building new housing. As New York owners converted rental units into coops to escape the price controls, the city then turned to public housing to solve the problem of housing the poor. The city's strange policy remains to try to increase the (modest) number of subsidized apartments rather than opening the market to more development, which would significantly increase the overall supply of housing at all price levels.

Houston, by contrast, has always been gung ho about development. Its founders, back in the 1830s, were two real-estate developers from upstate New York, Augustus and John Allen. Using $5,000 that Augustus's wife, Charlotte, had inherited, the brothers bought 6,600 acres that they hoped to turn into a "great city of government and commerce." They named the city after the hero of San Jacinto and promised prospective settlers (nonexistent) waterfalls.

Harvey Molotch and Joshua Logan's 1988 classic, *Urban Fortunes*, described the "urban growth machine": a collection of local business interests that unite to push economic expansion. Over 150 years, just such a machine, led by the Houston Chamber of Commerce, has worked tirelessly to turn Houston into an urban giant. It has made sure, above all, that nothing gets in the way of building. Indeed, the city is unique in America in not having a zoning code. Many deeds include land-use restrictions of various kinds, true, but these are voluntarily chosen by developers, not decided on high by government bureaucrats. Occasionally, groups rally to try to institute zoning regulations, but the growth machine invariably beats them back, often supported by some of the poorest people in the city. Houston's builders have managed—better than in any other American city—to make the case to the public that restrictions on development will make the city less affordable to the less successful.

Houston's development isn't costless. Like most growing places, it must struggle with water issues, sanitation, and congestion. For environmentalists who worry about carbon dioxide emissions and global warming, Houston's rapid growth is particularly worrisome, since Houstonians are among the biggest carbon emitters in the country—all those humid 90-degree days mean a lot of electricity to cool off, and all that driving gobbles plenty of gas. (Ironically, Houston's energy-consuming growth owes its success, in part, to the environmentalists themselves. By helping shut down new construction in denser places with mild climates, such as the San Francisco Bay, the activists ensure that new development will move to less dense places with harsher climates. People have to live somewhere.)

But Houston's success shows that a relatively deregulated free-market city, with a powerful urban growth machine, can do a much better job of taking care of middle-income Americans than the more "progressive" big governments of the Northeast and the West Coast. Still, it's a bad thing for the country that so much growth is heading to Houston and Sunbelt sister cities Dallas and Atlanta. These places aren't as economically vibrant or as nourishing of human capital as New York or Silicon Valley. When Americans move from New York to Houston, the national economy simply becomes less productive.

However, the right response to Houston's growth is not to stymie it through regulation that would make the city less affordable. It's for other areas, New York included, to cut construction costs and start beating the Sunbelt at its own game.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New York's Next Fiscal Crisis

Mayor Bloomberg needs to prepare the city for the crash of the Wall Street gravy train.

Nicole Gelinas

New York City, dependent on Wall Street for a quarter-century, has gotten used to harsh cyclical economic downturns, including the lending contraction in the early nineties and the bursting technology bubble in 2000. But today's turmoil may be not a cyclical downturn for Wall Street but instead the beginning of an era of sharply lower profits as it rethinks its entire business model. If so, it will produce the biggest economic adjustment and fiscal challenge that New York has confronted in more than three decades. If the city's leaders don't recognize this challenge and move quickly to meet it, New York could soon face an acute fiscal crisis rivaling its near-bankruptcy in the mid-seventies.

Such a fate—almost unthinkable to a city that has grown complacent about its world-class standing—could set Gotham back in the colossal strides that it has made over the past two decades in restoring its citizens' quality of life. As Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in May, we must "pray that Wall Street does well." But we'd better have a plan if it doesn't.

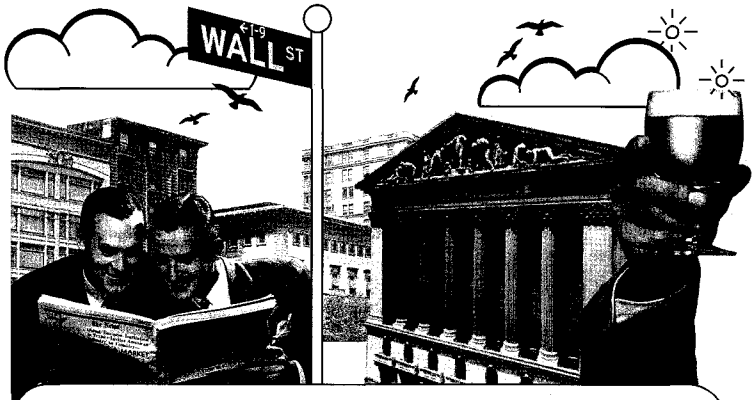
Wall Street bankrolled New York's long recovery from the seventies because New York, through its long economic, fiscal, and social deterioration, managed to keep its position as the nation's financial capital just as finance was about to take off. In the early eighties, the nation's financial industry—particularly Wall Street—was feeling its way toward a sweet spot where it would stay for two decades. As Federal Reserve chief Paul Volcker brought inflation under control, creating a stable environment for financial innovation and a stable currency for the world's savings, baby boomers and international investors flocked to U.S. markets. The Dow Jones Industrial Average tripled between 1982 and 1990, despite the '87 crash, while the assets of securities brokers and dealers more than doubled as a share of America's financial assets. The financial industry also saw a huge opportunity in Americans' increasing love of debt, creatively packaging it into everything from mortgage-backed securities to

Graphs by Alberto Mena

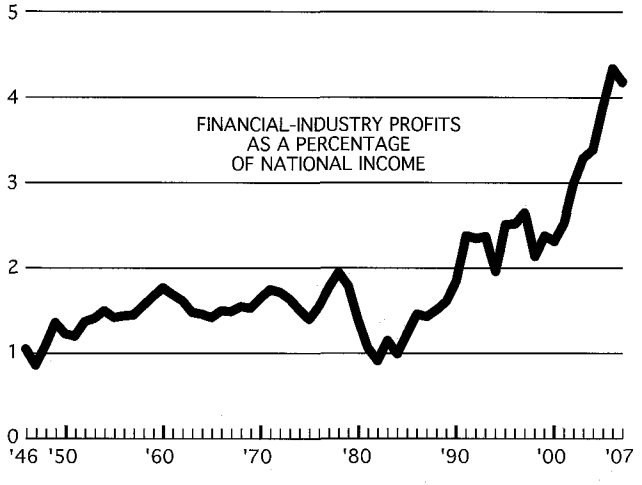
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

junk bonds and then selling it to investors. Between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, the financial sector's profits as a percentage of the nation's income more than doubled. The sector's pretax income as a percentage of all national income started a similar march upward. Profits at securities firms, while choppy, easily doubled between the early eighties and the end of the decade (all numbers are inflation-adjusted unless indicated otherwise).

New York reaped massive rewards from Wall Street's good fortune. The city's financial-industry employment grew by 14 percent in the eighties—more than triple the job growth in its other private-sector industries. Jobs in the securities industry in particular, which had decreased in the seventies, grew by more than a third. Since these positions were high-paying, they had an outsize impact: by the late eighties, according to the Fed, financial services contributed nearly 23 percent of New Yorkers' wages and salaries, up more than 60 percent from the previous decade. And financiers' heavy spending supported other jobs, from restaurant workers and interior decorators to teachers and nurses.



AS THE FINANCIAL INDUSTRY STARTED TO SOAR OVER THE PAST QUARTER-CENTURY. . .



SOURCE: AUTHOR'S CALCULATIONS, BASED ON FEDERAL RESERVE DATA

For evidence of how Wall Street started to lure newcomers to New York, look to Hollywood. Movies chronicling Gotham's grim decline, like *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Escape from New York* (1981), gave way to films portraying the heady excitement of making millions in the city, like *Wall Street* (1987) and *Working Girl* (1988). While much of the city remained grimy and dangerous, the excitement outweighed those factors for young, child-free baby boomers who paid high taxes without requiring many city services. The result: after hemorrhaging nearly 10 percent of its population between 1970 and 1980, New York gained nearly 4 percent back between 1980 and 1990. The city's tax take in 1981 had been slightly lower than its take a decade before; but by 1991, it was raking in a third more than in 1981.

This money allowed New York to reverse some of its bone-scraping seventies-era budget cuts and to invest in infrastructure without making the politically difficult choice of cutting deeply into social services. In the seventies, the city had laid off nearly 3,000 police officers and 1,500 sanitation workers; in 1985, Mayor Ed Koch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hired 5,300 cops and almost 1,000 sanitation workers. In the 1990s, it was largely Wall Street's breakaway success that gave Mayor Rudy Giuliani the financial resources to focus on making New York City safe again.

If high finance found its sweet spot in the eighties, it reached dizzying sugar highs starting in the late nineties and continuing, after recovering from the tech bust and 9/11, until last year. The nation was awash in the world's money, encouraging record lending and speculation as well as the creation of more financial products, which yielded banks massive profits. By 2006, the financial industry's corporate profits as a percentage of the nation's income had doubled once again.

"The financial industry may be entering a wilderness period of lower profits, employment, and bonuses."

It seemed that nothing could go wrong for Wall Street once it had bounced back from the tech bubble's burst. With the dollar serving as the expanding global economy's reserve currency, banks had oodles of money to lend. Cheap Asian imports were keeping prices and inflation expectations low, allowing central bankers to justify low interest rates. Beginning in the nineties, traditional consumer banks—previously tightly regulated to protect government guarantees for their depositors—began taking investment risks that once had been confined to Wall Street. As time went on, investment banks became more dependent on fees from debt backed by home mortgages and other consumer products, further blurring traditional lines between investment and consumer banking.

The financial world took advantage of the easy money and better technology. It booked high fees by designing ever more complicated "structured finance" products, backed by riskier home mortgages as well as corporate loans. Wall Street sold these products to international investors, who couldn't get enough of American debt, by making a seductive pitch: the products were structured so intricately that even risky mortgages were as safe as government bonds, and they paid better interest rates. Further, if an investor ever had to sell a mortgage-backed security after he had purchased it from a bank, it was a cinch, since Wall Street had "securitized" individual loans—that is, taken thousands of them at a time, sliced them up, and turned them into easily tradable bonds of different risk levels.

In addition to lending, Wall Street was borrowing at record levels so that it could take bigger and bigger risks with its shareholders' money, making up for lower profit margins on businesses like equity underwriting and merger advisories. Wall Street's borrowing as a multiple of its shareholders' equity was 60 percent above its long-term average by the end of last year (with sharp increases over the past few years). Firms were taking even more risks than that figure indicates, setting up arcane, off-the-books "investment vehicles" with shareholders still vulnerable if something went wrong.

As banks and financiers got unimaginably rich, so did the city. The finance industry's contribution to New Yorkers' wages and salaries topped out at over 35 percent two years ago. Last year, the city took in 41 percent more in taxes than it did in 2000, capping off an era of unprecedented revenue growth. While the city's stratospheric property market—itself a function of Wall Street bonuses and easy money—drove much of that increase through property-related taxes, corporate tax revenues rose by 52 percent, personal income tax revenues by nearly 20 percent, and banking tax revenues by nearly 200 percent.

But today, the financial industry may be entering a wilderness period of lower profits, employment, and bonuses. "Whether it's financials as a share of the stock market or financials

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a share of GDP, we've peaked," ISI Group analyst Tom Gallagher told the *Wall Street Journal* in April. One measure of how this downturn differs from those in the recent past: some Wall Street firms, after their disastrous miscalculations, are operating today only because the Fed, as Bear Stearns melted down in March, decided to start lending to investment banks, which it doesn't normally regulate or protect.

A new alignment of global demographics, inflation expectations, and interest rates may spell long-term trouble for the city's premier industry. A decade ago, cheap Asian goods kept prices and inflation expectations down; today, Asia's growth is pushing them up. Ballooning energy prices and too-low interest rates threaten to yield sustained inflation. America now faces intense competition—particularly from the euro—for the world's savings and investment, meaning that it can't depend on attracting as large a portion of the world's nest egg to keep interest rates down. "It is not credible that the world will revert to the same level of capital flow to the U.S. after the credit crunch is over," Jerome Booth, research head of U.K.-based Ashmore Investment Management, noted recently. The Fed can keep official rates low only at the risk of inflation and more capital flight. The end of cheap money means that the market for future debt may shrink, squeezed by tougher borrowing terms, cutting off a crucial profit line for banks.

Regulators, too, will be harder on the banks. Because investment banks now benefit from taxpayer-guaranteed debt, taxpayers must be protected. The feds probably won't let firms borrow from private lenders at the levels that they have over the past decade, and it's unlikely that they'll let banks rely so intensely on short-term debt—which is cheaper, but riskier, than long-term debt. (Short-term lenders can flee quickly, as the Bear Stearns crash showed, because they have the option of yanking their money out of investments, often overnight, while long-term lenders are stuck with the bets that they've made.) Less borrowing means lower profits, and not just temporarily. Regulation might also curtail Wall Street's lucrative business of complex derivatives, another huge area of risk. Plus, international stock listings continue to bypass New York for Asia and Europe because of the six-year-old Sarbanes-Oxley law, which imposes an unnecessary regulatory burden on companies publicly traded in the U.S., and also because the world's growth has moved east. Such losses could be ignored only when debt and derivatives were making up for it.

The skepticism of Wall Street's own investors and clients, though, is the real deal-breaker. The most startling news out of the current crisis is that Merrill Lynch, UBS, and others didn't know that they had taken certain risks for shareholders, lenders, and clients until they were already reporting tens of billions in losses. Clients and investors shouldn't mind losses when they understand the risks that they're taking. They do mind if, after the firm that they're investing in or doing business with has insisted that its careful models and safeguards protect them, it turns out that its only protection from bankruptcy is Uncle Sam.

International investors will not again blindly trust Wall Street's ability to assess and allocate risk. "Market participants now seem to be questioning the financial architecture itself," Fed governor Kevin Warsh said recently. Don't forget the stock market's performance, either: it hasn't been impressive over the past eight years.

New York City, so dependent on the financial industry's continued growth, should shudder.

If Mayor Bloomberg and his successor view the current downturn as another short blip, rather than a long readjustment of the financial industry's share of the economy, and they turn out to be wrong, the decisions that they make could prove ruinous. Over the past two and a half decades, whenever the financial industry underwent one of its periodic downturns, New York stuck to the same playbook: jack up taxes to make up for lower tax revenues, cut spending a bit, and wait for the financial industry to come roaring back. During the early nineties' credit crunch, Mayor David Dinkins slapped two temporary surcharges on the income tax; one still persists. In 2002 and 2003, after the tech bust and 9/11, Bloomberg temporarily hiked income

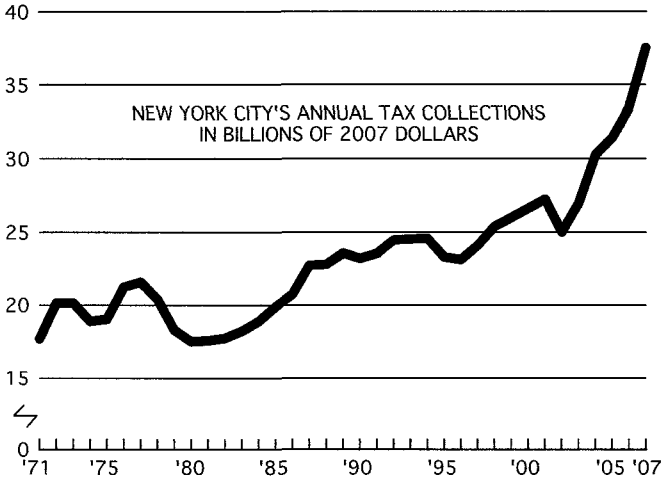
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and sales taxes and permanently hiked the property tax.

Those tax increases were never wise because they kept less profitable industries and their lower-paid employees out, making New York ever more dependent on finance. Even the financial industry didn't ignore the tax hikes; partly in response, it sent back-office, five-figure-a-year jobs to cheaper cities, and as a result, New York today has less than one-fourth of the nation's securities-industry jobs, down from one-third two decades ago. Still, the industry was growing so fast that it and its workers could withstand the higher costs posed by the tax increases.

But what was once merely unwise could be calamitous today. Consider the last time that New York tried raising taxes when its premier industry was about to shrink—the mid-sixties, when the city's leaders arrogantly believed that its record population of 7.9 million people, in the middle of a record economic boom, wouldn't mind paying for a breathtaking array of Great Society social programs, as well as fattened public-employee benefits. In 1965, the *New York Times* had reminded city leaders that "New York City's economy is prospering," and its editorialists decreed a year later that "strong medicine, specifically higher taxes, is the remedy for restoring New York's financial health." Mayor John Lindsay, with state support, enacted the city's first personal income taxes, as well as new business taxes, in 1966. New York went on to lose half of its 1 million manufacturing jobs between 1965 and 1975—a trauma as great as Wall Street's troubles today, because in 1960, manufacturing had accounted for more than a quarter of New York's jobs. At the same time, the city was also losing its collection of corporate headquarters and their legions of well-paid employees. By the end of the seventies, half of its 140 Fortune 500 companies had fled the city.

. . . NEW YORK REAPED MUCH OF THE PROFITS THROUGH TAX COLLECTIONS . . .



SOURCE: AUTHOR'S CALCULATIONS, BASED ON NEW YORK CITY OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET DATA

New York didn't anticipate this change or understand its significance as it was happening. Well into the early seventies, the city thought that it could keep taxing and spending because the future was bound to mirror the "Soaring Sixties." City officials argued that fleeing companies were evidence of New York's success because some companies just couldn't afford to be here any longer. Worse, the city's leaders

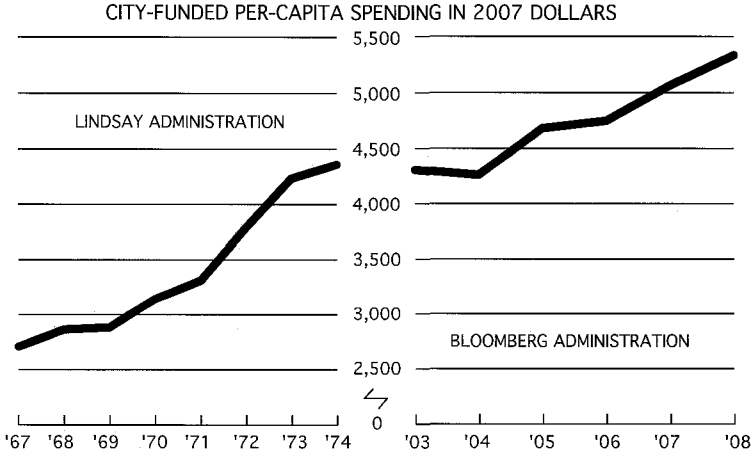
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't understand how quickly urban quality of life could deteriorate: as they focused on social spending rather than vital public services like policing, murders shot up from 645 in 1965 to 1,146 just five years later. Nor did they realize how quickly middle-class residents would flee, taking their tax dollars with them.

For a while, the city and its lenders found a way around these miscalculations. New York stepped up its borrowing against future tax revenue in the late sixties and early seventies, paying the banks back when the following year's tax receipts rolled in. The foolishness of such a plan was always obvious: three years before the city skirted bankruptcy, the *Times* reported, Albany skeptics warned that large-scale temporary borrowing was folly. But even as economic and fiscal conditions worsened, the city kept spending and spending. In 1970, city leaders were heartened by the judgment of bond-rating agency Dun & Bradstreet, which noted New York's "extraordinary economic strength . . . and long-range credit stability." (Then, as now, ratings agencies weren't good at predicting acute crises.) In 1972, as what had once seemed like a short downturn stretched on, *Times* editorialists encouraged complacency, noting that "after all the years of . . . warnings of imminent municipal bankruptcy, it is reassuring to find investors . . . bullish about the outlook for New York City's long-term financial soundness."

By late 1974, however, as rising spending outpaced tax receipts, a crisis was inevitable. It came the following spring, when New York wrestled with a budget deficit that equaled 14 percent of its expected spending and creditors cut the city off. Forced to throw itself at the mercy of the state and federal governments for emergency funding, Gotham gutted trash pickup and policing, murders climbed to 1,500 annually, and more residents left.

. . . ALLOWING CITY SPENDING TO RISE DRAMATICALLY UNDER MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG.



SOURCE: ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS, AUTHOR'S CALCULATIONS, BASED ON NEW YORK CITY OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET DATA

Millennial New York likes to think of itself as vastly superior to the troubled city of the 1970s. But once again, on the brink of what may be a major economic upheaval—this time, involving the financial sector rather than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

manufacturing—it is reacting with disturbing complacency. And yet again, the mayor has allowed the budget to swell dangerously during the good times, which could push leaders to make the same mistakes as were made in the sixties and seventies: raising taxes at precisely the wrong time and slashing vital services under pressure to keep up social and public-employee spending.

During the past decade, New York used the cash that Wall Street was showering on the city not to ease its long-term problems but to make them worse. In 1974, under Lindsay, the city devoted one-quarter of its budget to social spending: welfare, health services, and charities. Today, the city continues to spend one-quarter of its budget on social services (not including the public schools' vast social-services component). Nor has New York reformed the pensions and size of its still-huge public workforce, reduced debt costs, or cut Medicaid costs fueled by Albany's powerful medical lobby, which helps ensure that New York's per-capita Medicaid spending—rife with waste and fraud—is the highest in the nation. Even after adjusting for inflation and considerable population recovery, the city's tax-funded budget for 2008 is 22 percent higher than it was at its Lindsay-era peak. While spending rose just 9 percent or so during the Giuliani era, it has risen three times as fast since—the highest rate since Lindsay left office.

"The mayor has sharply increased spending in one area that was easily controllable: the city's public schools budget."

Echoing a time when people said that New York was ungovernable, Mayor Bloomberg often calls these costs "uncontrollable." But there was no better time to start controlling them than during the past half-decade, an era of unparalleled prosperity and public safety when Bloomberg had an opportunity available to no other modern mayor. If he had successfully bargained with Albany and union employees to require new workers to contribute more to their pensions and health benefits, we would have seen the results by now. Likewise, if he had worked with Albany to rein in Medicaid spending—now nearly $6 billion a year—the city could have spent some of that money to build schools and fix roads, reducing debt costs. Instead, we've got a politically powerful public workforce that commands benefits belonging to another era and that remains vulnerable to corruption despite this generosity, as recent construction investigations show.

The mayor has also sharply increased spending in one area that was easily controllable: the city's public schools budget, up by more than one-third since 2001 even though enrollment is down 4 percent. Much of that spending funds plusher teachers' salaries and the higher pensions that follow, plus borrowing costs for school construction and rehab, making it harder to cut than it was to increase. Today, the education budget is nearly $21 billion: one-third of the entire budget, and more than police, fire, and sanitation combined.

Bloomberg's failure to control costs during the boom means that big trouble looms. The city projects that spending over the next three years will increase by more than 20 percent, while revenues will increase by just 13 percent (neither figure is adjusted for inflation). If that happens, a $4 billion–plus deficit—nearly 10 percent of tax-funded spending—will result in two years' time. Moreover, that's the best-case scenario, based on the city comptroller's prediction of low growth this year and next and a healthy recovery after that. But the mayor expects a 7.5 percent economic *contraction* this year, followed by a smaller contraction. If that happens, revenues might not rise as much as 13 percent; in fact, they might shrink, as they often did in the seventies (and again in 1990 and 2002).

This risk is especially acute because our progressive tax structure and the growth in wealth of our richest citizens over the past two decades make New York highly dependent on the rich,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whose income is volatile. Two years ago, the top 1 percent of taxpayers paid nearly 48 percent of the city's personal income taxes even after adjusting for the temporarily higher tax rate, up from 46 percent in 2000, 41 percent a decade ago, and 34 percent two decades ago, according to economist Michael Jacobs at the city's independent budget office. A few bad years for the city's wealthiest translate into a few terrible years for their home base.

Cutting a $4 billion deficit—let alone a $5 or $6 billion one—is a formidable task even when done slowly. Cutting such a deficit in a hurry two years from now, under an inexperienced mayor, will endanger the city's vitality. It's not too late for Bloomberg to prepare the budget for a painful economic adjustment, and not just by cutting around the edges of the "controllable" budget, as he's prudently done this year and last.

The first principle is to do no harm on the tax side. Bloomberg will allow a temporary property-tax cut to expire, and he has told the *Times*: "If all else fails, we're not going to walk away from providing services, and only then would I think about a tax increase, and my hope is that we'll avoid it." He'll have to: while the city has proved that it can squeeze higher taxes out of a phenomenal growth industry, that trick won't work on an industry that's stagnant or in decline. New York's sky-high income taxes for businesses and residents already put the city at a huge disadvantage, since they keep away lower-paying jobs from media, technology, and other industries that otherwise might be attracted by lower housing costs and commercial rents in the coming years. The city can't afford to make this disadvantage any worse.

Second, the mayor must carefully manage his budget cuts. This year, he proposed largely across-the-board cuts of about 6 percent in projected spending, covering everything from police and sanitation to homeless services and education. He also enacted a 20 percent slash to the long-term capital budget, which funds physical infrastructure. But this strategy won't work for long. Vital services can't withstand deep cuts. The mayor must not alienate the middle class, whose tax revenues he needs, and that means protecting the police department, cleaning streets, and keeping libraries open. (His May delay in hiring 1,000 new police officers for more than a year, even as New Yorkers are becoming wary of crime again, is worrisome.) Further, failing to fix decaying infrastructure isn't a way to save money. It's no different from borrowing to pay for other expenses, since waiting will worsen deterioration and mean more expenses later.

So as Bloomberg readies his final budget over the next year, he'll have to choose the deepest cuts to projected spending carefully, even though it requires fighting the city council, which has nixed half his proposed cuts, especially protecting education. Rising education spending under both Bloomberg and Giuliani hasn't improved scores on national tests, after all. And within the capital budget, the city should reduce its spending on economic-development and affordable-housing subsidies in order to fund things like roads and transit adequately. Furthermore, New York pols should stop regarding the operating and capital budgets as unrelated. Ten percent of Medicaid's $6 billion annual take would go a long way toward upgrading the city's roads and subways. Last, tens of millions of dollars in politically connected earmarks by both the mayor and the council are unsavory in good times and unconscionable in bad.

But ultimately, the mayor can't fix the city's budget without addressing its "uncontrollable" half, whose growth will be responsible for three-fourths of the deficit in three years' time. Bloomberg—and his successor—can use fiscal stress to advantage in bargaining for changes in city contracts. In the past, in fact, the city's biggest bargaining gains have come during fiscal turmoil. As Charles Brecher and Raymond D. Horton noted in their 1993 book, *Power Failure: New York City Politics and Policy Since 1960*, the city won sanitation productivity gains in 1981, while it was suffering the fallout from the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, and a less costly pension tier two years later. While police officers won a raise this year that was necessary to attract recruits, the mayor must not let the city's other unions

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bring home similar gains through contract renegotiation.

The city's contract with more than 100,000 non-uniformed workers expired this spring, presenting an opportunity. New York should negotiate to get this union, DC-37, to allow new employees to accept a pension plan in which the city contributes to workers' private accounts, rather than guarantees a pension for life. The independent budget office estimates sizable budget savings here—nearly $100 million annually—within half a decade. Requiring health-insurance-premium payments of 10 percent from these workers and retirees would save half a billion dollars more; extending the workweek from 35 and 37 hours to 40 (imagine!) would net another half-billion, savings that the next administration will dearly need if Wall Street doesn't roar back. The mayor (and his potential successors) must impress upon unions that their members won't get a better deal if they wait.

"Two years ago, the top 1 percent of taxpayers paid nearly 48 percent of the city's personal income taxes."

But why the urgency? After all, New York has huge advantages today. Half a century ago, suburban growth was driven by cheap fuel, fast commutes, and low crime. Today, suburbs are choked off by congestion, $5-a-gallon gas, and bad public schools. The city's governance approach is also different. If crime starts to rise, we know what to do: aggressively police neighborhoods and prosecute and sentence defendants appropriately. And the city's new citizens—many of whom have invested their lives' savings in their homes—should help politicians keep some focus, counterbalancing to some extent the organized pressure to sacrifice all else for education spending. The city's budget has safety latches, too. New York's fiscal near-death in the seventies spurred the state to impose extraordinary oversight and brought about local changes. The city can't borrow much today for operating spending. It must balance its budget annually and project four years' worth of expected spending and revenues, submitting the results to a state board.

Yet these advantages aren't limitless, as recent high-profile shootings in Harlem and Far Rockaway indicate. If a mayor lets crime spiral out of control over a crucial one- or two-year period, it will be harder to control later. The middle class won't be patient for long if its voice isn't heard, and the city's "global" upper class is much more transient than it was 40 years ago. Plus, with one-third of the population leaving every decade, New York must continually attract new residents. As for city finances: no amount of regulation can guard against complacency. The city couldn't have balanced its budget this year and reduced next year's deficit if not for the huge surplus that Wall Street provided last year, before it ran out of steam. The city doesn't have to default on its bonds to get into trouble, as it nearly did three decades ago, moreover. Sacrificing quality of life so that it can *pay* those bonds would do as much damage. Finally, if the city does need help, it can't look to New York State to bail it out, as it did 33 years ago: this time around, Albany might be in equally dire straits.

Even if we do all the hard work of fixing the budget and in two years' time, Wall Street is defiantly humming along, once more channeling record tax revenues into the city's coffers, the steps that we take today won't have been wasted. By acting now, Bloomberg will enable his successor to consider income tax cuts and infrastructure investment. Just as we prepare for a terrorist attack that we hope will never come, we have to prepare for a fiscal and economic crisis that we hope will never come. The risk is real.

Research for this article was supported by the Brunie Fund for New York Journalism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Marshall Plan for Reading

How New York schools can close the racial achievement gap

Sol Stern

During his six years as New York's schools chancellor, Joel Klein has spent many a Sunday morning speaking from the pulpit of a black church about his efforts to reform the public school system and to help African-American kids get a better education. "We have to make education the civil rights issue of our time," Klein asserted in a speech for Al Sharpton's National Action Network in Memphis this year. "In America today, we have a racial achievement gap that is the shame of this great nation, and until we get right on education, we are not going to be right." And now Klein and Sharpton have created a new national organization devoted to closing that achievement gap.

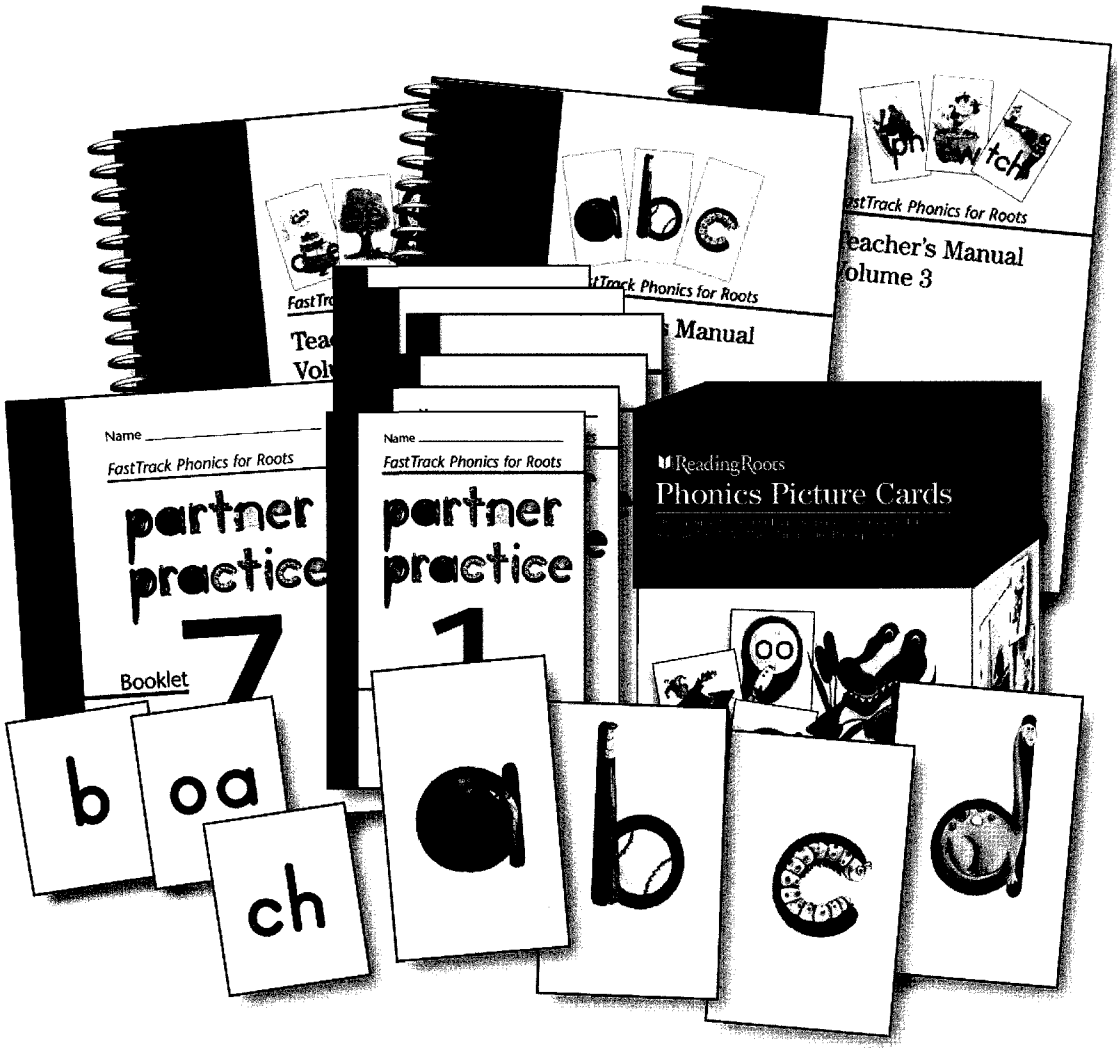
Admirable sentiments—but the approach that the city has taken to address this problem rests on flawed ideas and won't work. It's time for another line of attack: a Marshall Plan for reading.

Chancellor Klein deserves kudos for confronting the black-white achievement gap, the elephant in the room that most big-city school chiefs avoid talking about. Klein has even created a special office dedicated to closing the gap—a first, as far as I know, among the nation's urban school districts. To run the office, he recruited Roland Fryer, a young African-American academic and a rising star on the Harvard economics faculty, giving him the newly minted title of Chief Equality Officer of the Department of Education. At a public meeting at the Schomburg Center in Harlem shortly after his appointment, Fryer told the mostly black audience: "This is a personal mission between me and the ten-year-olds in Harlem."

Fryer understands the grim odds better than most. In a recent academic paper, coauthored with University of Chicago economist Steven Levitt (of *Freakonomics* fame) and based on new national data from the National Center on Education Statistics, Fryer found that the average black student enters fourth grade at the 19th percentile of the white distribution in math and at the 22nd percentile in reading. Even when the study controlled for socioeconomic variables, blacks were still at the 35th percentile of the white distribution in math and the 39th percentile in reading.

In an earlier study, Fryer and Levitt had hoped that improved school quality and teaching might shrink this achievement gap. "We speculate that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



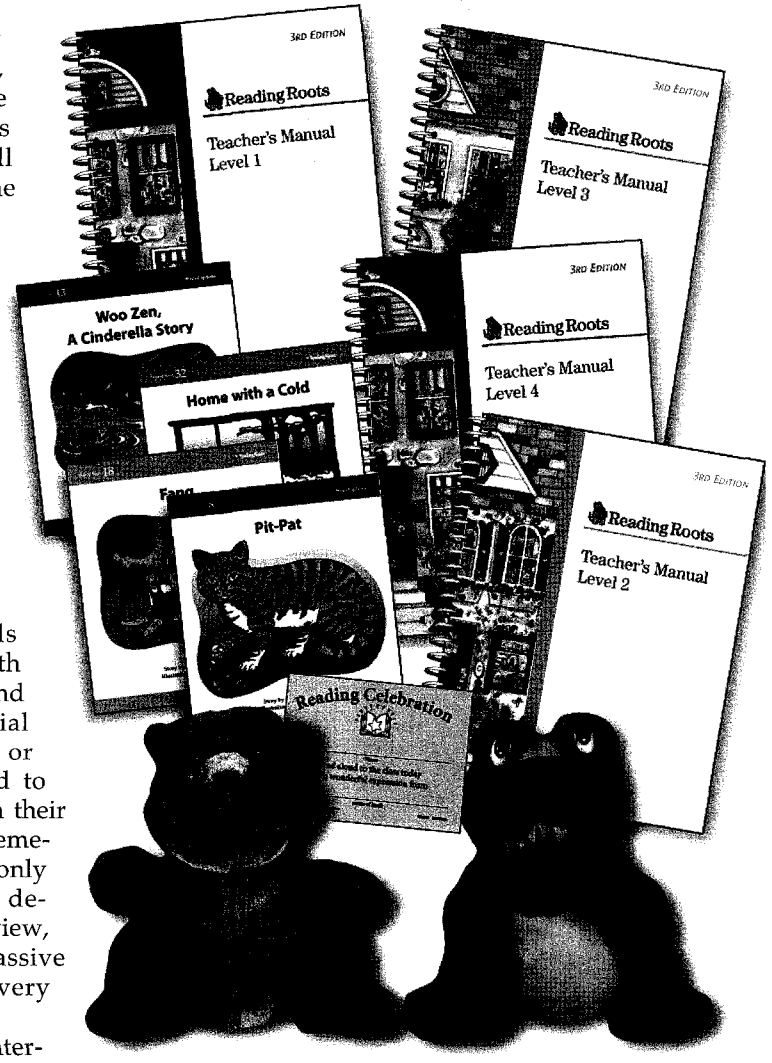
COURTESY OF THE SUCCESS FOR ALL FOUNDATION (2)

blacks are losing ground relative to whites because they attend lower-quality schools that are less well maintained and managed as indicated by signs of social discord," the researchers wrote. In the new paper, however, they concluded that "systematic differences in school quality appear much less important in explaining the differences in test-score trajectories by race, once the data are extended through third grade; Blacks lose substantial ground relative to Whites within the same school and even in the same classrooms. That is, including school- or teacher-fixed effects [does] little to explain the divergent trajectories of Black and White students between kindergarten and third grade. . . . By the end of third grade, even after controlling for observables, the Black-White test-score gap is evident in every skill tested in reading and math except for the most basic tasks such as counting and letter recognition, which virtually all students have mastered."

How to narrow this yawning gap? Start by thinking more concretely about the cognitive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deficits of those Harlem ten-year-olds Fryer mentioned. Inner-city black children, research shows, begin school with only half the vocabulary of white middle-class children. Typically, they soon fall behind in trying to decode how the written English language blends the sounds made by letter combinations into words. "Difficulties in decoding unfamiliar words rapidly are at the core of most reading problems," says Reid Lyon, former head of reading research at the National Institutes of Health.



Reading problems, in turn, are at the core of the black-white achievement gap. Reading is the motor of *all* education—the basic skill that leads to all other academic skills. Disadvantaged kids who can't read adequately by fourth grade aren't as likely to understand math problems, science and social studies texts, computer manuals, or much else. They're almost doomed to falling further and further behind in their later school years. At that point, remediation is probably too late. The only way for them to avoid the fate described in Fryer's research, in my view, is for the city to undertake a massive reading intervention, targeting very young inner-city black children.

Not just any kind of reading intervention, either. Starting in kindergarten, those children should be taught to read with instructional programs that meet the standards of scientifically based reading research and have been proven to work in actual classrooms. And that means early mastery of phonics and phonemic awareness. The findings from three decades of scientific, peer-reviewed reading studies (supported by the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Science Foundation and summarized in the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel) show that beginning readers—above all, those from disadvantaged homes—benefit from reading classes in which students learn systematically and explicitly to hear and identify the different speech sounds in spoken words, to recognize the symbols that represent the speech sounds, and to blend them into words, while also building fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

New York City's 2002 shift to mayoral control of the schools created a unique opportunity to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

try just such an intervention, and for a time, it seemed as though it might happen. Introducing his education-reform plan a year later, Mayor Michael Bloomberg said that schools in the past had enjoyed too much autonomy, with "a baffling profusion of approaches to teaching the three Rs throughout the city." Now, there would be "one, unified, focused, streamlined chain of command [and] the Chancellor's office will dictate the curriculum and pedagogical methods." The mayor promised that reading instruction in the early grades would "employ strategies proven to work," including "a daily focus on phonics."

But in a tragically mistaken policy decision, Klein went in the opposite direction on reading, franchising out most instructional decisions to a group of progressive educators who regarded it as a crime to teach children how to read through scripted phonics programs. Under the influence of his deputy chancellor for teaching and learning, Diana Lam, Klein chose an approach called Balanced Literacy for the system's core reading program starting in September 2003. The city's version of Balanced Literacy was crafted by Teachers College education professor and progressive-ed guru Lucy Calkins and included only a small phonics component, Month by Month Phonics. The rest of the program assumed, based on no real evidence, that children can intuit the meaning of printed words through context clues and through such activities as "shared reading" and "read alouds." Champions of this approach believe that children can learn to read simply by reading—by immersing themselves in print. The city imposed the new program on virtually every elementary school in the city, even shutting down the special Chancellors' District set up by one of Joel Klein's predecessors, Rudy Crew, in which about 35 high-poverty schools were using a research-based reading program called Success for All and almost uniformly achieving higher reading scores.

"Disadvantaged kids who can't read adequately by fourth grade aren't as likely to understand math, science, or much else."

I was one of a handful of local education writers who sounded an alarm about the city's failure to choose a reading program that had at least a chance of mitigating the black-white achievement gap (see "Tragedy Looms for Gotham's School Reform," Autumn 2003). Admittedly, none of us was a professional reading specialist. But Klein was getting the same warnings privately from a group of six or seven internationally recognized reading researchers, including several members of the National Reading Panel. He remained unmoved. The reading controversy, he observed, was like the " 'less filling / tastes great' debate" about light beer—that is, it wasn't all that important.

The city's wrong turn left thousands of poor black children struggling to learn the phonetic code of the written English language. This made it virtually impossible to reduce the black-white achievement gap in reading in the early grades—a judgment confirmed by the 2007 federal NAEP tests (recognized as the gold standard in education testing), which assessed New York City's fourth- and eighth-graders and showed that from 2003 to 2007, neither grade achieved a statistically significant improvement in reading. African-American kids remained as far behind as ever. (Mayor Bloomberg has periodically celebrated the city's gains on the state's reading tests, but the ever-widening gap between those tests and the NAEP has undermined their credibility. This year, the average reading score in the third through eighth grades rose 6.8 percentage points, but scores were up by similar margins in every corner of the state—suggesting that the quality of the tests, not the city's reforms, was the proximate cause.)

Then, during the 2006–07 school year, the education system went through another upheaval. Bloomberg and Klein placed all their bets for school improvement on market-style accountability reforms, such as granting principals greater

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

autonomy over budgets, making schools compete against one another for letter grades, and offering bonus pay to administrators and teachers who boosted student scores. It's not clear how these system-wide incentives will benefit black children in grades K–3: one can easily imagine a scenario in which the market incentives raise average test scores for the system's 1,400 schools while the black-white test-score gap in the early grades grows even wider. The separate initiatives launched out of Fryer's "equality" office seem even more quixotic. In one, the city gives cash rewards to disadvantaged children from fourth grade to high school for good attendance and test scores. Another program offers some minority high school students free cell phones, with text messages from rappers like Jay-Z urging them to make academic progress and incentives like extra minutes if they keep their grades up. There's scant research to support the efficacy of these initiatives, nor do they do anything to affect the achievement gap where it all begins—in the first four years of school.

Still, it seemed reasonable to wonder whether the new school autonomy might improve reading instruction in some K–3 classrooms. Might the newly liberated principals decide on their own, or receive encouragement from the DOE, to use phonics-based programs with strong track records, such as Success for All, Direct Instruction, Open Court, or Read Well? Fryer declined an interview, but three mid-level DOE officials gave me an informative background briefing. First, I discovered that despite the introduction of greater school autonomy, Balanced Literacy remains the core reading program in virtually every elementary school in the city. The officials weren't aware of a single school using one of the core reading programs proven to be effective. Worse, the DOE is still urging all the schools' principals and reading coaches, who train teachers in how to teach reading, to use as a guide a revised version of its first Balanced Literacy handbook. The new version continues to make the same false claims for the program's effectiveness that the outside reading experts criticized five years ago.

It's understandable that an outsider like the chancellor could have been tempted, at first, to accept the professional judgment of veteran progressive educators on pedagogical matters; of necessity, he had to attend to the much-needed management reforms of a dysfunctional bureaucratic system, and that took up a lot of time and energy. But Joel Klein is nothing if not a quick learner. He surely must have figured out by now that the progressives have sold him a bill of goods, particularly on reading. In a talk at the American Enterprise Institute in early June, Klein conceded that it was probably a mistake to mandate Month by Month Phonics. Nevertheless, he and Bloomberg remain so committed to their theories about market incentives that instructional issues still take a backseat at the DOE's Tweed Courthouse headquarters.

To have any chance of narrowing the black-white achievement gap, such inattention toward reading instruction must end. What Klein and Bloomberg should do—and there's still time during their administration—is launch something like a Marshall Plan for reading improvement. The DOE would select the 300 highest-poverty and lowest-scoring elementary schools in the city and offer to pay for scientifically based reading programs in each of those schools in grades K–3. It would provide the schools' principals with the research supporting such programs, allowing them to choose the ones that would best suit their schools. To maximize the impact of the reading intervention, the children would be in classes no larger than 15 students. (There are legitimate questions about whether class-size reduction across the board is an effective school-improvement policy, but the famous Tennessee Class Size Study found that reducing class sizes in grades K–3 from 22 to an average of 15 had significant positive effects, particularly on African-American children.) The teachers in the targeted schools would receive extra training in implementing scientifically based reading programs.

The DOE would also create an office of reading improvement, headed by a nationally recognized expert in scientifically based reading instruction. The office would coordinate the intervention, advise principals on the efficacy of the various reading programs, and commission a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rigorous study on the effectiveness of the new reading initiative. (To date, the DOE has done no research on whether its current Balanced Literacy approach to reading instruction is working.) With all due respect to Roland Fryer, New York City needs an effective office of reading improvement, and a reading czar to run it, more than it needs a Chief Equality Officer.

I estimate that the Marshall Plan would cost the city no more than $150 million, based on an average of about 600 children in grades K–3 in each of the 300 targeted schools, and assuming as much as $800 per student for the costs of the reading programs, class-size reduction, and extra teacher training. That's a significant financial investment, sure, but there's a reasonable hope that it would eventually pay itself back in reduced expenditures for the special-education referrals caused by children's reading failure. Moreover, there's little doubt that the financial resources exist to pay for this. When Bloomberg took control of the school system, the education budget was at $12.7 billion. Over the next six years, it rocketed to $21 billion. Within those extra $8 billion, it should be possible to find the necessary funds—under 1 percent of the total education budget—for a Marshall Plan for reading.

"New York City needs an effective office of reading improvement more than it needs a Chief Equality Officer."

As evidence that the Marshall Plan isn't pie in the sky, we have seen a test run at P.S. 65, a Queens K–5 elementary school. Impressed with the evidence that Success for All could significantly improve reading among poor, at-risk students, a wealthy hedge-fund entrepreneur and education philanthropist named Joel Greenblatt paid for the program at P.S. 65, with its population of low-income immigrants from Latin America and South Asia. Greenblatt also paid for additional aides and tutors in each classroom, an approach similar to lowering class sizes. When the project started in 2002, only 36 percent of P.S. 65's fourth-graders were reading at grade level. Within three years, the percentage of fourth-graders passing the state reading test (acknowledging its seeming limitations) shot up to 71 percent. In 2005, the school was one of 14 to win a state award for dramatically improved performance. The officials from the DOE who briefed me weren't even aware of the P.S. 65 story, though the magazine *New York* chronicled it in 2006.

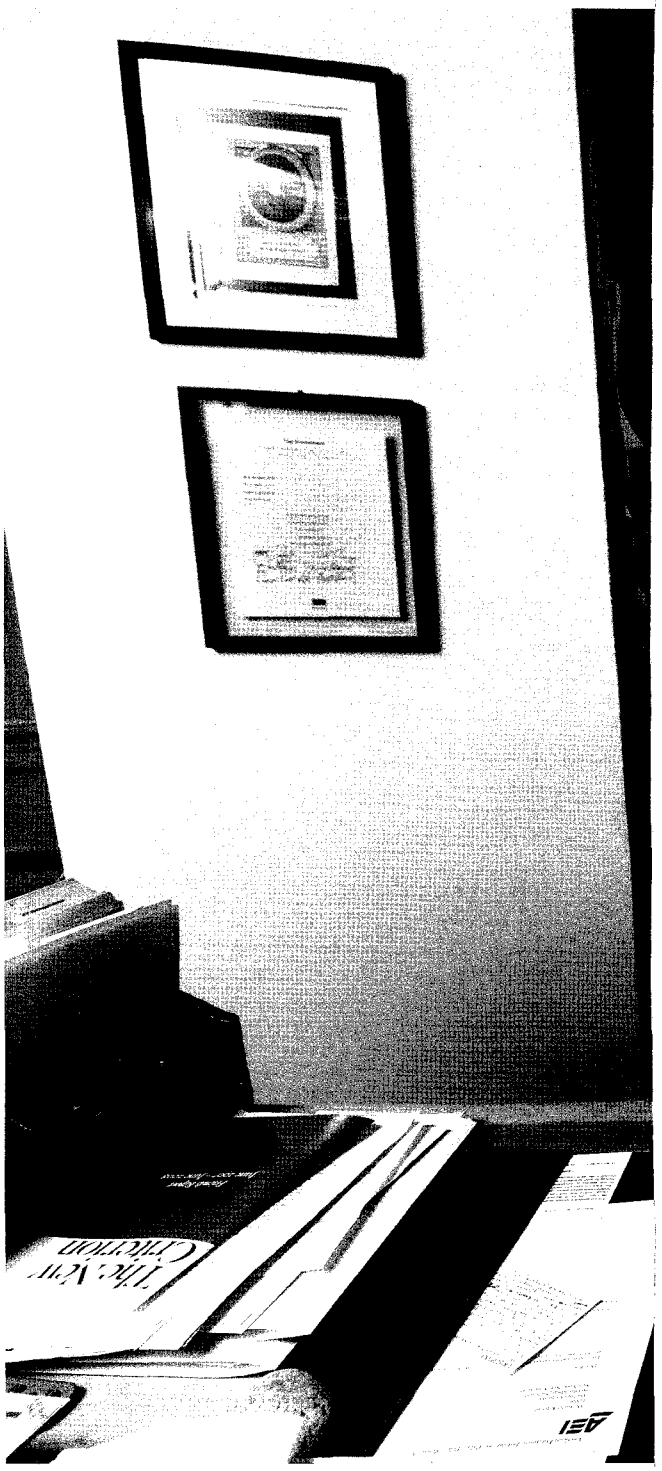
Greenblatt has moved his pilot project to the Harlem Success Academy Charter School, which opened its doors to one kindergarten and one first-grade class in September 2006. The CEO of Harlem Success is Eva Moscowitz, the former chair of the City Council Education Committee. She's convinced that with Success for All and a dedicated and productive teaching staff, her school's students, 95 percent of them black and poor, will smash through the achievement barrier. After visiting the school recently, I tend to agree with her. In the first-grade reading classes, I saw extraordinarily effective instruction, as teachers followed the carefully scripted Success for All lesson plans, with their systematic emphasis on sound blending and then the children's use of that skill as they read texts.

Klein has visited P.S. 65 and is aware of the dramatic improvement in its students' test scores. Klein is also a great champion of the Harlem Success Academy Charter School and touts it as demonstrating the value of greater parental choice in public education. He's right about that, of course. But the instructional lessons of P.S. 65 and Harlem Success Academy, and their relevance for all black children at risk of reading failure, should be just as obvious. If it isn't yet clear to Klein and Bloomberg, we can only hope that it will be to their successors. A Marshall Plan for reading as a means of closing the black-white achievement gap is a worthy platform for anyone hoping to be the next mayor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Future of Conservative Books

As mainstream publishers' flirtation with the Right cools, smaller houses are stepping in.



Harry Stein

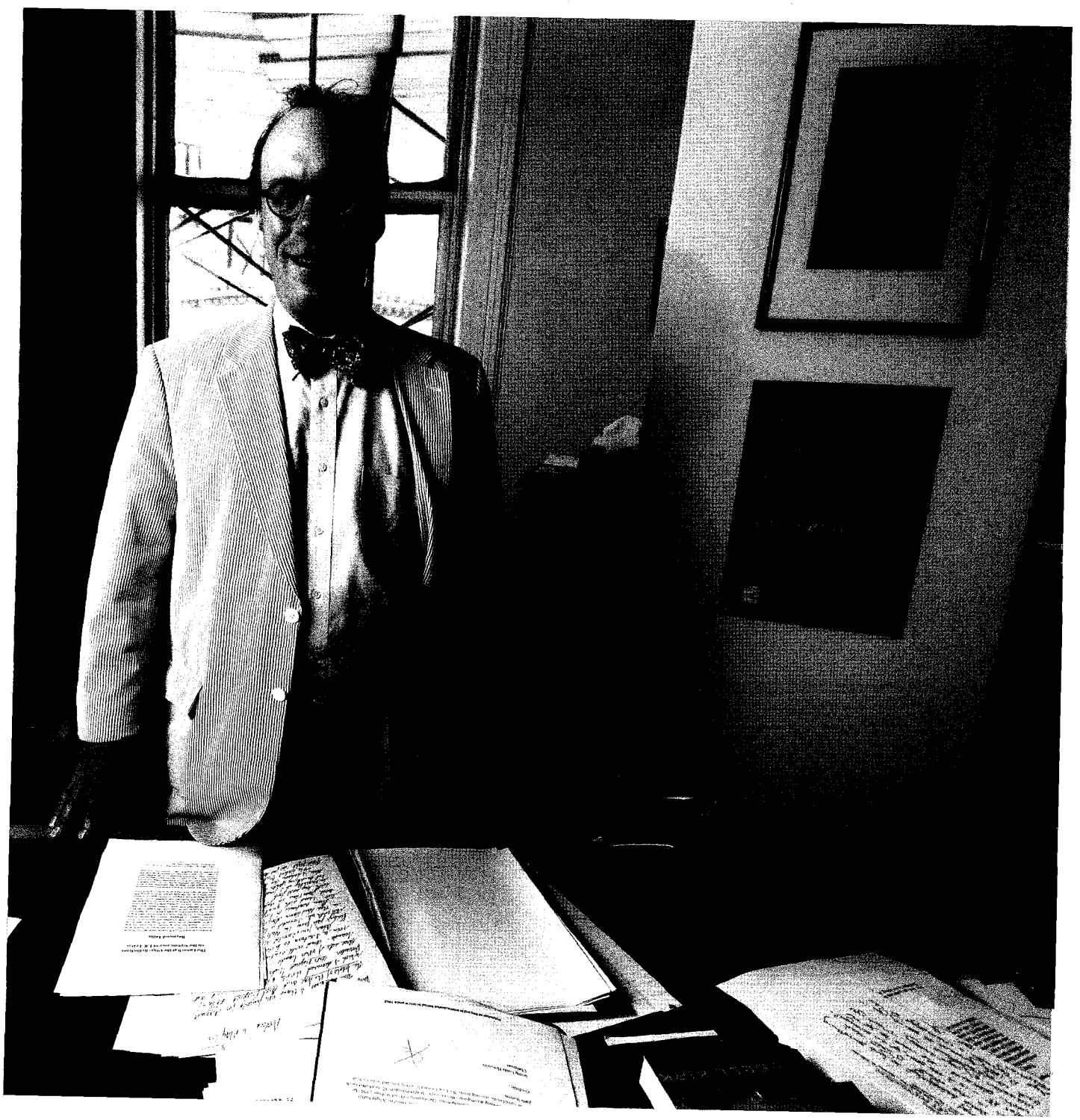
In 2003, something unthinkable happened in the tradition-bound—and unapologetically liberal—world of book publishing: two of the largest and best-known conglomerates, Penguin and Random House, set up imprints, Sentinel and Crown Forum, dedicated to producing conservative books. Two years later, Simon and Schuster added its own right-leaning imprint, Threshold.

Behind this development lay the stark commercial fact that since the mid-nineties, conservative titles had been showing up in profusion on the nation's bestseller lists. For a while, industry veterans found this phenomenon fairly

Roger Kimball, publisher of right-leaning Encounter Books, which had one of its best years in 2007

Photographs by Harvey Wang

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

easy to discount. After all, most of the conservative bestsellers were products of one small house, Washington, D.C.–based Regnery, regarded in the business as a fringe right-of-center operation, and many dealt with a single (if seemingly inexhaustible) subject: the public and private transgressions of the White House's occupants, Bill and Hillary Clinton. Surely the bizarre trend would play itself out soon. But even after the Clintons departed Pennsylvania Avenue, Regnery's conservative hits kept coming: insider accounts like former CBS correspondent Bernard Goldberg's *Bias*, historically grounded critiques of liberalism like Mona Charen's *Useful Idiots*, and the scorched-earth polemics of Ann Coulter. With such books generating tens of millions of dollars in sales, mainstream publishing finally could no longer ignore the math, and plunged into the conservative market.

Conservatives had every reason to take the new imprints as validation, another vital step in an ongoing process. One by one, the media bastions were falling: first talk radio, thanks largely to Rush Limbaugh; then TV, with FOX's dominance of cable; and, of course, the rise of the conservative blogosphere. Now mainstream publishers had at last realized, however grudgingly, that there were millions of conservative readers out there.

Yet over the past few years, some of the optimism on the right that greeted this publishing mini-revolution has faded. Outside the new imprints, the New York publishing world clearly remains a liberal stronghold, uncomprehending of, when not outright hostile to, conservative ideas—and authors. Mainstream media outlets that conventional publishers rely on to tout books have just as little enthusiasm for conservative titles. And though George W. Bush has been an incredible boon to conspiracy-mongering authors on the left, he's done the opposite of good for sales at the new imprints, which have faced a much tougher market of late. In fact, there is much evidence suggesting that the rich vein of Coulter-style liberal-bashing polemics that drove so much of conservative publishing's healthy sales has largely been mined. Amid all this uncertainty, will the new conservative imprints survive?

Conservative books are hardly a new phenomenon. As early as the 1920s, there was a small but steady market for conservative titles, mostly produced by houses far from Manhattan and the odd university press. Originally published by Morrow in 1935, *Our Enemy, the State*, Albert J. Nock's influential brief against New Deal statism, has since enjoyed no fewer than five editions, from Caxton, Hallberg, Ayer, Laissez Faire Books, and Fox & Wilkes. Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* eventually found an American publisher in the University of Chicago Press in 1944, and Yale University Press ran Ludwig von Mises's *Omnipotent Government* five years later. The original publisher of Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative*, in 1960, was Victor, out of Shepherdsville, Kentucky; and 1964's *A Choice, Not an Echo*, by Goldwater booster Phyllis Schlafly, was produced by tiny, Alton, Illinois–based Pere Marquette. (Similarly, Ivan R. Dee, which publishes some of today's most thoughtful books on public policy from a conservative perspective—including many by *City Journal* authors—is out of Chicago.)

Even mainstream houses produced the occasional conservative title. In 1988, to take the most famous example, Simon and Schuster paid little-known University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom a modest $10,000 advance and got a surprise monster bestseller, *The Closing of the American Mind*. "Dick Snyder was running S. and S. back then, and he really did believe in the free market of ideas," remembers Bob Asahina, who edited the book. "I was pretty much free to acquire anyone I wanted." Brad Miner, who would go on to work at *National Review* and run the conservative book club American Compass, says that Harper and Row hired him in 1984 in part *because* he was a conservative. "I brought them books by Bill Buckley and Charles Kessler," he recalls, "and also Sidney Hook, who was hardly a conservative but felt like one to the lefties at Harper. But of course they were names. Every time I brought up someone they hadn't heard of, they would say, 'No, Brad, we want to do conservative books, just not this one.' There really was no conception of the size of the potential market, or what the country was like. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like the famous Steinberg drawing with New York as the center of the world, that odd liberal version of reality."

But for conservatives of the late eighties and early nineties, the go-to house was the Free Press, run by the legendary Erwin Glikes, a Belgian-born refugee from Nazism who turned right in the wake of the 1968 student protests at Columbia. Under his auspices, the Free Press briefly constituted a one-company revolution, publishing traditional conservatives like George Will and Robert Bork as well as the provocative likes of Dinesh D'Souza, David Horowitz, Francis Fukuyama, and Charles Murray, whose collaboration with Richard Herrnstein—*The Bell Curve*, on the differences in intellectual capacity among individuals and groups—set off a national furor. In 1994, however, the Free Press was swallowed up by Simon and Schuster and went liberal. "You'd think the industry would have learned something from the success of so many Free Press authors and *The Closing of the American Mind*," notes Adam Bellow, who was mentored by Glikes at the Free Press, later became Doubleday's in-house conservative editor, and today works at HarperCollins, where he is still one of the few acknowledged conservatives working in a mainstream house. "But no. They resisted trying to seriously get into this market for another 15 years."

"For conservatives of the late eighties and early nineties, the go-to house was the Free Press, a one-company revolution."

They resisted even after the appearance in 1992 of the biggest conservative blockbuster of all, Rush Limbaugh's *The Way Things Ought to Be*. Acquired for a low-six-figure advance by a maverick junior editor at Simon and Schuster named Judith Regan, the book went on to own the Number One spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 24 weeks, but liberal decision makers in the business still regarded it as an aberration. That left a gaping opening for the emerging conservative colossus, Regnery (a successor to the Henry Regnery Company, which had published such notable books as William F. Buckley's *God and Man at Yale* and Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*)—until the New York publishing world woke up.

Crown Forum is indisputably the most successful of the new imprints. Launched in a glow of optimism by Steve Ross—that rare publishing liberal genuinely interested in books all over the ideological spectrum—it started with a sales asset precious almost beyond measure: Ann Coulter, who had been lured from Regnery. As every infuriated liberal on the planet knows, she has churned out red-meat bestsellers, the foundation of Crown Forum's success, ever since.

According to Nielsen's BookScan, which measures retail sales, Coulter's most recent bestseller, last fall's *If Democrats Had Any Brains, They'd Be Republicans*, has sold 126,000 hardcover copies to date, by most standards an extremely impressive figure. That pales beside the 279,000 copies BookScan recorded for her previous bestseller, 2006's *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*, as well as her earlier efforts, it's worth noting. But as Jed Donahue, her gentlemanly editor at Crown Forum, points out, BookScan fails to register sales at some of Coulter's chief outlets, like conservative book clubs and below-retail superstores like Costco and BJ's. Further, *If Democrats Had Any Brains* was not an original work but a deftly organized collection of previously published quotations—and it still debuted at Number Three on the *Times* bestseller list.

The reception of Coulter's next original book this fall—the subject and title remain under wraps—will show whether she retains her status as the wicked queen of conservative publishing. In any case, over the past five years Crown Forum has built up a roster of other notable right-leaning authors, from Michael Barone and Ken

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Timmerman to M. Stanton Evans and Robert Novak, who have sold respectably if not spectacularly; indeed, Novak's quirky memoir, *The Prince of Darkness*, was a bestseller last year. Crown Forum's future roster includes not only Coulter and George Will but Charles Murray, Michael Medved, and Florida senator Mel Martinez, whose memoir will describe his arrival in America as an impoverished Cuban teenager.

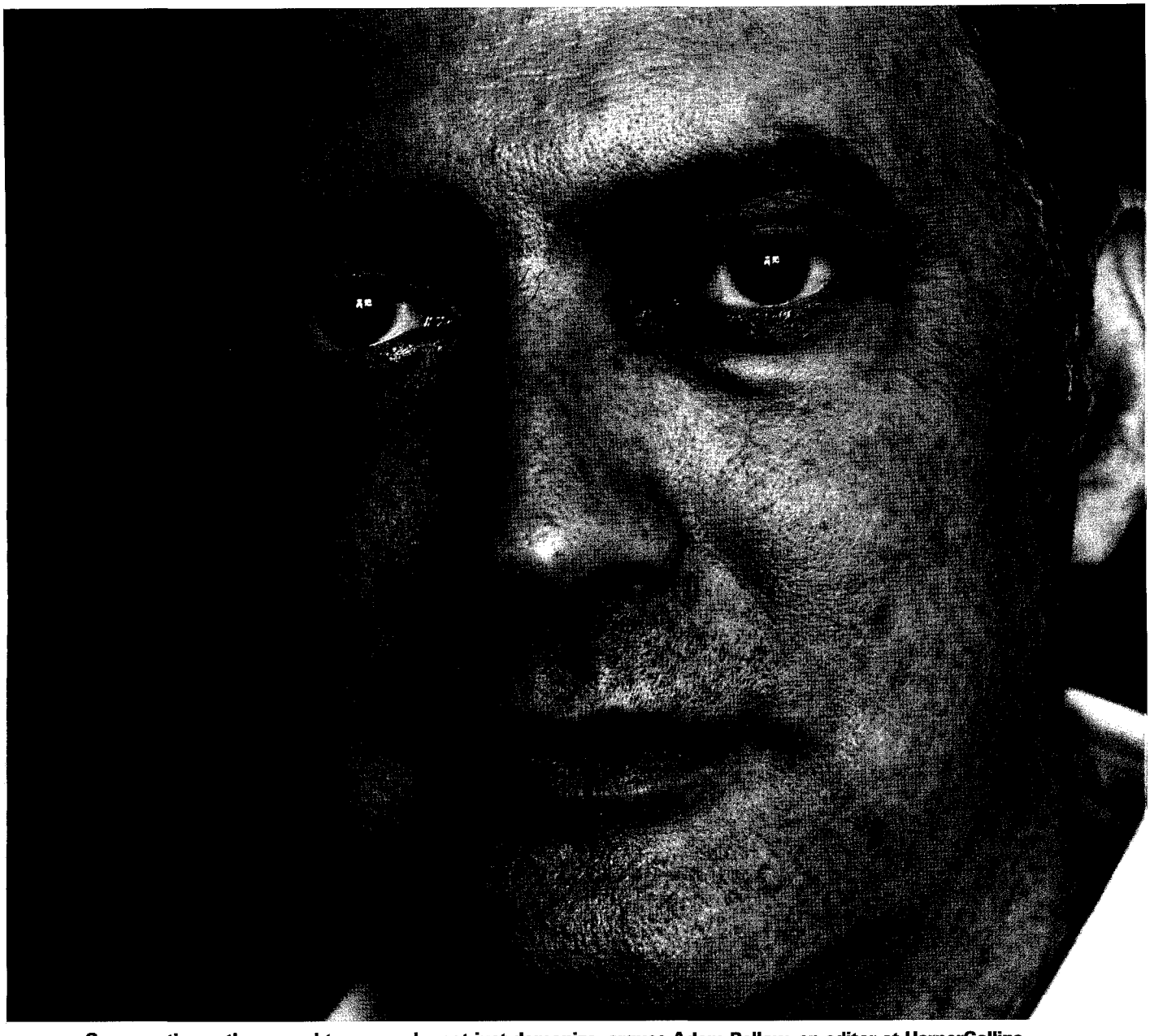
Penguin's Sentinel imprint, however, has had a less impressive record lately. True, it scored some major victories in the past, including Ronald Kessler's pro-Bush *A Matter of Character*; Mona Charen's *Do-Gooders*, on liberal good intentions gone horribly awry; and its biggest seller of all, Ed Klein's 2005 *The Truth About Hillary*, which left its author such a pariah in liberal elite circles that he had to give up his home in the Hamptons. But over the past several years, Sentinel has failed to produce a similar success, and publisher Adrian Zackheim allows that it has recently "been taking on fewer books and become a lot more selective. This year we'll publish only five or six, including Mike Huckabee's book—down from ten a few years ago. We want to keep the imprint as robust as possible, but the way to do that is not simply to keep our output up and pretend the market is what it was three years ago." With that in mind, Sentinel has just signed Donald Rumsfeld's memoir, slated for 2010.

Threshold, the third entry in the mainstream-goes-conservative sweepstakes, got off to a disastrous start through overreliance on top editor Mary Matalin's network of Washington insiders-turned-authors—its first title, Mary Cheney's *Now It's My Turn*, sold only 9,000 copies after an advance said to be in the million-dollar range. But the imprint has lately produced a pair of hits: *Surrender Is Not an Option*, John Bolton's chips-fall-where-they-may memoir about his highly charged stint at the UN; and talk-show host Glenn Beck's good-natured assault on political correctness, *An Inconvenient Book*, which has recorded sales of more than 300,000. Threshold looks to upcoming books by proven sellers Beck and radio talk-show host Mark Levin, as well as General Richard Myers, to continue that trend. "The lesson we've learned, or actually relearned, is that there are no hard-and-fast rules in this business, aside from the fact you've got to be smart, creative, and persistent," observes Louise Burke, Threshold's publisher. "There's a conservative market out there, and it's not going away."

Despite the imprints' diverse experiences, their staffers can agree on one thing: the continuing hostility of the broader publishing world, which dismisses most conservative titles as unserious screeds by mean-spirited ideologues. Don't hold your breath waiting for even the most gifted and serious conservative writer to pick up a Pulitzer or the National Book Award. After the 2004 election, notes Bellow, "it became an anthropological question for them: 'Who *are* these people?' There followed a whole cottage industry of books and articles trying to prove that conservatives are a product of bad parenting, psychological syndromes, or genetic defects—as well as generally stupid and evil."

Among mainstream publishers, hostility toward conservative thought is so pronounced that it can distort all semblance of commercial judgment. Bernard Goldberg's *Bias* ended up with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Conservative authors need to persuade, not just demonize, argues Adam Bellow, an editor at HarperCollins.

Regnery only because the book—originally titled *Media Culpa,* before the marketing wizards at the conservative house renamed it—was turned down by every mainstream publisher his agent sent it to. "He would call me," recalls Goldberg, "and report, 'So-and-so passed,' then read me the note from the editor. It would say things like, 'This is well written, but the premise doesn't make any sense. Liberal bias? What's *that* supposed to mean?' "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still, when the agent reported that Regnery was potentially interested, Goldberg was unsure. "A conservative publisher? I felt a little funny about that." Friends told him that going with Regnery would stigmatize the book, brand it as slanted by definition. Thinking back, he can only thank his lucky stars that he didn't listen—and, even more so, that the mainstream houses had no interest. "This idea that a Regnery book is somehow illegitimate is just incredible BS! Why is it that we're supposed to be concerned about Regnery being a conservative house, but nobody worries about all the publishers in Manhattan being liberal houses? It scares me even thinking about what would've happened if I'd gone with one of those houses. The book would've come and gone in a minute and sold exactly no copies!"

More to the point, the book would never have energized the crucial public debate on liberal media bias that has raged ever since. Even as it was, most of Goldberg's former colleagues in the mainstream media—many of whom *brag* that they've never read the book—continue adamantly to deny that such bias exists.

The mainstream houses demonstrate their liberal bias even when they condescend to publish a non-PC book. Take *Until Proven Innocent*, Stuart Taylor and K. C. Johnson's look at Durham D.A. Michael Nifong's legal near-lynching of three Duke University lacrosse players accused of rape and how the university and the liberal media mob abetted it. Published by the Thomas Dunne imprint of St. Martin's Press, the book was much anticipated in conservative circles and appeared to great critical acclaim. Yet it died quickly, victim of a publisher that utterly failed to grasp its potential appeal. "They [initially] printed only 13,000 copies and, as far as I know, gave it no advertising," says a still-frustrated Taylor, who considers himself a liberal. "Amazon sold out the third day, and we got hundreds of e-mails from all over the country from people that couldn't find it in the stores, which just killed it commercially. The truth is, the house just never seemed very excited about the book." According to BookScan, the book ended up selling 17,000 copies.

Bellow reports that even Jonah Goldberg's recent mammoth bestseller, *Liberal Fascism*, which he edited at Doubleday, was at first given short shrift by the house. "We printed 14,000 copies, and shipped 12,000," he says. "But Jonah was an Internet star, and in the first week, the demand from his troops was so intense that it jumped onto the *Times*'s list. With 12,000 copies in print! Even then, Doubleday just eked the book out into the marketplace, reprinting in quantities of 5,000 or 10,000. If this had been a book by a major liberal journalist, they would have gone out with 30,000 copies and reprinted in increments of 20,000, and we would have been up to 150,000 in no time, with huge stacks in Barnes and Noble. Even when Jonah's book hit Number One, it still wasn't easily obtainable. You'd walk into a Barnes and Noble and, if they had it at all, it would be tucked away on the second floor in the back in the sociology section. Eventually, they pushed the book up to 198,000 copies. I would like to have seen 300,000 in print."

It isn't surprising, then, that while those who edit the new conservative imprints are *in* the publishing world, they are distinctly not *of* it—a dispiriting obstacle in a business that thrives on collegiality. "It was total culture shock," says Bernadette Malone, until recently senior editor at Sentinel. "Everybody reads the *New York Times* every day and takes it as orthodoxy—signing books on that basis! It was evident very quickly how insular the whole system is. They could all name three, four, five chefs but couldn't name a single clergyman." Malone vividly recalls the morning after George W. Bush's reelection in November 2004. "I'm sitting there in my office, and a young editorial assistant walks in. Without a word, she raises her eyes to the sky, turns up her palms and wrists"—Malone demonstrates, making like a martyred saint—"and starts weeping in front of my desk." She pauses. "All I can say is, 'I'm very sorry for your loss,' which is what you say at a funeral, right?"

Since the new conservative imprints have far less latitude than traditional nonfiction imprints to fail, they tend to rely heavily on, and largely be defined by, a handful of proven iconic authors. "Each of these companies has its own Ann Coulter, Pat Buchanan, or Bill O'Reilly," says

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brad Miner, "and is constantly seeking the next." But, counters Crown Forum's Donahue, "Too many people, even in the industry, buy into the caricature that conservative publishing is all about polemics. We've published memoirs like Bob Novak's *The Prince of Darkness* and Michael Medved's *Right Turns*; serious works of history; investigative journalists like Bill Gertz and Ken Timmerman; not to mention the George Wills and Michael Barones of the world." Malone similarly cites Sentinel titles like Mary Eberstadt's brief against day care, *Home-Alone America*, and Nonie Darwish's *Now They Call Me Infidel* as books that were "reasoned, thoughtful, and made an enormous contribution to the debate in the public arena."

"Mark Steyn's best-selling *America Alone* went unreviewed by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*."

Even reasoned, thoughtful contributions don't, however, yield balanced media treatment: mainstream press coverage for conservative books is almost invariably unfavorable, if it happens at all. A leftist polemic like Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?*—which takes as its thesis that midwesterners tend to vote Republican because they are blithely ignorant of their own self-interest—can generate reams of copy on the nation's leading op-ed pages and in magazines from *The New Yorker* to *Playboy*. In the 20 years since *The Closing of the American Mind*, no book on the right has had anything like a comparable reception in the press. Denis Boyles's recent *Superior, Nebraska*, a smart and witty rejoinder to Frank that stresses midwesterners' historical industriousness and self-reliance, generated no mainstream attention at all.

Still more striking is the example of Syracuse professor Arthur C. Brooks's *Who Really Cares?*, which showed that conservatives give a good deal more to charity than liberals do. With a surge of support from conservative media, including prized appearances on Rush Limbaugh's and Bill O'Reilly's shows, the book took off. Yet it was almost impossible to find a liberal who knew it existed, since it went unreviewed and unremarked upon by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and was never covered on any network news program or NPR. "If we could have had a generalized debate in the culture—if CNN had been willing to cover the subject the way FOX did—the impact could have been so much greater," says Brooks. "FOX was all over this like a cheap suit. But FOX is behind a firewall." Meanwhile, Mark Steyn's best-selling, enormously controversial *America Alone* similarly went unreviewed by the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Small wonder that Roger Kimball, publisher of right-of-center, independent Encounter Books (which also frequently publishes *City Journal* authors), no longer bothers sending his titles to the *New York Times*. Similarly likely to savage any book identified as conservative are the professional journals: *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*, which are widely read by booksellers, and *Library Journal*, a guide for the nation's librarians that can guarantee a long shelf life well after a book's sales have stopped.

Bellow routinely gives liberal colleagues on the marketing side a short primer on the realities of publishing conservative books. "You have to prepare them for what's going to happen—you're going to get the bad review in *PW*, followed by the indignant column by Paul Krugman—but you have to let them know that in this case, bad is good. We need our enemies, we cherish them. We use the *New York Times* to energize conservative media. I send every book I publish to [*Times* columnist] Frank Rich, with a nice note saying, 'I hope you hate this one.' Unfortunately, they've gotten a little more savvy about being used that way, and tend not to respond. That's why I miss Anthony Lewis—he could never restrain himself."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No wonder the hugely successful Regnery selling machine aims its books directly at the conservative base, looking to talk radio, FOX News, and the Internet to drive sales. "*Oprah* is not one of the places we go for our books," notes Sandy Schultz—who started with Regnery and now does publicity for a range of conservative imprints—of the show most mainstream publicists would give their firstborn to book. "We're much more interested in *Fox and Friends* than the traditional network morning shows. The fact is, liberal producers don't want to give conservatives a platform. When Tom Friedman or even Al Franken has a new book, you'll never see someone on from the other side challenging them, but if they have on a conservative, they'll set up a debate format. The School of Regnery says: 'No media for media's sake; media to sell books.' " The approach has paid off. Though Regnery produces only 20 to 25 titles annually, of the 72 conservative books that have been on the *New York Times* bestseller list in the past six years, 23 were from Regnery, and more than half of the rest were by authors who got their start with it.

Conservative houses and imprints deserve credit for their innovation in utilizing the new conservative media and their stubbornness in getting the word out. But their efforts don't change the fact that mainstream press bias still distances their books from what Mortimer Adler termed "the great conversation," the ongoing dialogue at the upper echelons of American intellectual life about the crucial moral and intellectual questions.

Bellow isn't optimistic about the new conservative imprints' future. "My own feeling is that these imprints are *designed* to fail," he says. "Management would be happy to see them succeed for financial reasons—yet because they basically see this type of publishing as deeply distasteful, an alien organism within the publishing body, they'd be just as happy if they fail. Then they could say, 'See, we tried, this kind of publishing is not a good business,' and move on." Regnery president and publisher Marji Ross concurs. "The large publishing houses have always held their noses when it comes to conservative imprints," she says. "My guess is that if they survive at all, they'll transition from conservative politics to just politics and current events." And so does Encounter's Kimball: "The truth is, there's never been real commitment to the ideas in those books or, for that matter, to genuine intellectual pluralism. Once it's clear the wind's shifted and they're less profitable, it's a good bet they'll be gone."

If the imprints are to survive, perhaps it will be through what Bellow describes as persuading "mainstream publishers to stop seeing conservatives as a market to be ghettoized and exploited, but as a vital part of the American tapestry. But," he adds, "I also think conservatives are also going to have to adjust—get smarter, argue better, and write more with an intention to persuade, rather than just mock, belittle, and demonize." The future of conservative publishing, he says, is not in books that can be readily dismissed as "right-wing hyperbole" but in those that so manifestly grapple with important ideas that even those on the other side cannot dismiss them. The recent success of small, idea-driven Encounter—which enjoyed one of its best years ever in 2007 with books like Melanie Phillips's *Londonistan*—as well as that of Delaware-based ISI Books suggests that he may be right. Similarly, Crown Forum's Donahue asserts that the current deep divides on the right will lead to a less doctrinaire movement, creating a climate where "there will be room for a lot of different voices" and invigorating the conservative imprints.

But no matter what happens to those imprints, conservative publishing will certainly survive—and thrive. If liberals continue to ignore the power of conservative books, moreover, the losers will not be conservatives—who cannot help but be endlessly exposed to left-wing views through the networks and leading newspapers—but liberals themselves, complacent in their ignorance of the other side. "There's always another side, that's a classically liberal argument," observes Bellow with a laugh. "The problem for contemporary liberals is that they really don't understand it applies to them." ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Health Care's New Entrepreneurs

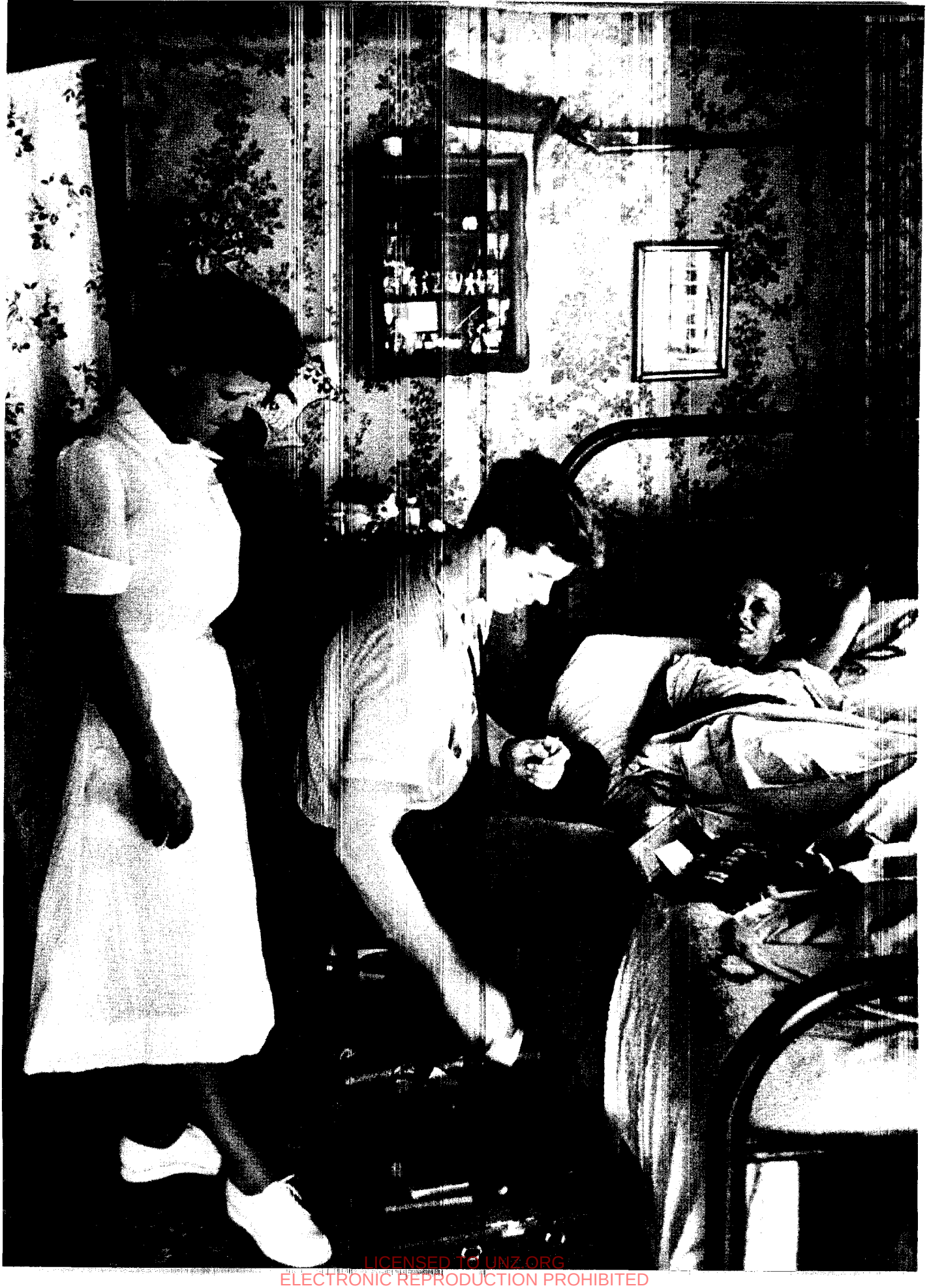
Innovators are bringing consumer-oriented medicine to market, with promising results.

Paul Howard

For seriously ill patients, American health care is second to none. Our commitment to innovation is unmatched; our researchers have won more Nobel Prizes for medicine than all other countries' combined; our biotech and pharmaceutical industries, thanks partly to lavish federal funding for basic science research, are the envy of the developed world. So lopsided is the field that thousands of European scientists have relocated to companies in the U.S., where they have a better chance of transforming cutting-edge research into lifesaving new medicines.

But American health care is also much more confusing, impersonal, and expensive than it needs to be. Conflicting opinions from doctors and insurers often strand patients with complex diseases in a medical maze. Many primary-care physicians, frustrated with red tape and puny reimbursements, limit the number of Medicare and Medicaid patients whom they see, or they drop out of the profession altogether. Adding insult to injury, employers and employees face seemingly endless cost increases, with health-insurance premiums rising much faster than inflation or income.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thankfully, entrepreneurs are finding ways to bring innovative, consumer-oriented health care to market—simplifying medical decisions, reinvigorating primary care, and lowering health-care costs. From health insurance to DNA-driven medicine, American health care is experiencing a revolution from below that promises to improve quality, lower costs, and empower people to control their own health care.

Today, we shop for cut-rate hotels on Travelocity, bargain for airfares on Priceline, and seek reliable information on everything from computers to flat-screen TVs at CNET. The same information explosion is occurring in health care. Dozens of websites, such as WebMD, Revolution Health, and eHealthInsurance, now offer consumers up-to-the-minute information on medical conditions, drugs, and insurance options, as well as basic quality information on doctors and hospitals. Internet-savvy patients can walk into their doctors' offices knowing more about the latest treatments than their physicians do.

Critics counter that health care is more complicated than hotels. Without someone to help manage complex information, they point out, patients may find themselves overwhelmed by options, fall prey to snake-oil salesmen, or fail to see that they have received incorrect diagnoses or poor treatment plans. But where critics see a problem, entrepreneurs see an opportunity. Companies are finding ways to make even the most complicated medical decisions simpler for patients.

Take the Boston-based firm Best Doctors, founded in 1989 by Harvard Medical School professors. Best Doctors uses peer evaluations of physicians—polling 50,000 doctors worldwide in 400 medical specialties—to identify leading medical experts and then makes them available to 10 million patients in 30 countries. Normally, insurance companies limit patients' access to specialists by requiring prior authorization for referrals, limiting access to preferred networks, or asking patients to pay more out of pocket. Patients whose employers offer Best Doctors, on the other hand, can go directly to the firm without prior authorization whenever they have serious medical problems and need help making decisions.

"From health insurance to DNA-driven medicine, American health care is experiencing a revolution from below."

One such patient is John de Beck, a California teacher diagnosed with prostate cancer. De Beck faced a dizzying array of options, from cutting-edge robotic surgery to more traditional surgical, hormone, and radiation treatments. Since his employer had contracted with Best Doctors, John immediately had access to a "handler" who got John's permission to send his medical records—including original biopsy slides and CT scans—to a Best Doctors clinical team. The team wrote a synopsis of John's case and sent it to a leading Harvard expert on prostate cancer. Within a few weeks, John and his doctor got a binder from the expert that examined and explained his treatment options and made a personal recommendation for him.

Over the next year, John consulted with Best Doctors every time he needed to make a key decision about his treatment—for example, getting another opinion from a University of Chicago expert about a new type of radiation treatment, proton therapy. The depth of the reviews—and the fact that they came from leading experts who had no stake in his case—proved invaluable. "I can't imagine, with the income that I've got, to be able to even find . . . somebody to personally review my case and write a personal diagnosis," de Beck says.

New technologies and business models promise to make primary care personal again, as in the days when doctors made house calls.

ROBERT W. KELLEY/GETTY IMAGES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FPG/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

"We trust patients to self-select," Best Doctors president Evan Falchuk explains. "When they feel uncertain about something, they have the most interest in making sure things go right." Falchuk hopes that Best Doctors is part of a growing trend toward more consumerism in health care—even in single-payer systems like Canada's. "Even government-run systems are suffering from the same cost trends we are," he says. Consequently, they are searching for ways to share costs with people, "and as the financial burdens fall more on individuals, those individuals want control."

Marcus Welby, M.D. last aired on ABC in 1976. Fast-forward 30 years or so, and think about the prime-time doctor dramas that have replaced it: *ER*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *House*, *Scrubs*, and *Nip/Tuck*. The folksy primary-care doctor familiar to patients a generation ago has all but vanished from America's primary cultural medium, television—and this reflects his real-life decline. Insurance reimbursements, and especially Medicare, may pay primary-care physicians only a small fraction of the actual costs of treating patients, especially after one takes into account rising demands on doctors' time and dramatically increased administrative overhead. Consequently, many doctors are retiring or avoiding primary care. In reality, as on television, hospital emergency rooms and expensive specialists are replacing them.

Personal relationships between primary-care doctors and patients foster long-term health and keep health-care costs in check, so this is an unwelcome development. And it could hardly come at a worse time. The need for primary care will rise rapidly in the years ahead as tens of millions of aging baby boomers develop serious chronic ailments ranging from heart disease to diabetes to cancer. The nation's over-65 population will double by 2030; the American Academy of Family Physicians, however, reports that from 1997 to 2005, the number of med-school graduates entering primary-care residencies dropped 50 percent.

Enterprising firms can bring the services of top specialists to more Americans.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Policymakers compound the problem by advocating universal insurance schemes that would inject millions more patients into the system without fixing any of its underlying problems. In July 2007, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that many Massachusetts residents were having trouble finding primary-care providers, even as the state embraced a universal insurance mandate that could thrust 550,000 previously uninsured residents into overcrowded doctors' offices. The Massachusetts Medical Society found that for new patients, the average wait to see an internist was up 57 percent since the previous year, to more than seven weeks.

Primary-care doctors' woes are severe in the rest of the country, too. "Most physicians out there are in networks, meaning that they accept insurance and are held to the reimbursement schedules currently available to them," says Kevin Kelleher, a Virginia doctor. And insurance rewards procedures—tests and surgeries—much more handsomely than it does working with patients on the prevention and management of chronic disease. The result: as reimbursements have flatlined or even declined, the traditional family practice has evolved into a high-volume, prebooked business in which physicians have just a few minutes to spend with each patient. "Double booking has become extremely common in the last six or eight years," Kelleher observes. "Doctors don't have any quality time to spend with their patients. . . . They're lucky if they can address a current pressing health issue, let alone discuss prevention."

Instead of waiting for the system to change, some physicians are changing the system. In 2004, in Reston, Virginia, Kelleher and Mark Vasiliadis founded Executive Healthcare Services, where clients receive a full range of preventive, primary-care, and acute treatments for a flat monthly fee of $150 to $450, depending on the size of their families. There are no contracts; if EHS clients don't feel that they're getting value for their money, they can leave. Kelleher says that EHS's patient-retention rate is about 98 percent.

This out-of-pocket payment model counters some of the system's perverse incentives. "We can very frequently just discuss problems on the phone with patients, since 90 percent of the diagnosis traditionally comes from their history," Kelleher points out. "If someone calls with elbow pain, I can spend 15 minutes on the phone with them. I don't have a financial impetus to get them into my office."

Comparatively high prices allow EHS to operate with just 300 patients or so, a stark contrast with the 2,500 patients whom the average primary-care doctor must serve in order to turn a profit after low insurance reimbursements. EHS's enviable scale won't work nationwide, Kelleher admits, but he thinks that components of his program could be modified to accommodate larger practices and lower prices. For instance, patients could bolster their current insurance reimbursements with a flat monthly fee—maybe as little as $20—and in exchange receive enhanced primary-care access (longer appointments, say) from doctors with somewhat smaller practices.

Further, filing claims with insurance companies is so time-consuming and expensive that doctors could lower prices—perhaps by 20 to 30 percent or more—simply by offering more basic services on a cash basis. Primary-care physicians in this type of system would likely see fewer patients every day but could offer them more time and attention. Some observers have derisively called this "concierge medicine." But it would be more accurate to say that Kelleher and his colleagues have embraced a primary-care model that puts the doctor-patient relationship first—where it used to be.

This model seems to be gaining traction with frustrated patients and doctors. Last October, one West Virginia doctor made national news when the *Wall Street Journal* chronicled his prepaid primary-care plan. Vic Wood offers the 100 or so patients in his plan unlimited primary and urgent care, basic diagnostic tests, and many generic drugs for a monthly fee ranging from $83 for an individual to $125 for a family.

One patient is a private music teacher who, before joining Wood's plan, had gone without health insurance for four years because his wife's health insurance would have cost him $400 a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

month. Wood diagnosed him with high cholesterol and is treating him, with excellent results. A local business started offering Wood's clinic as a benefit, switched to a major medical plan with a high deductible, and saw its monthly premiums drop by $4,000. The firm's health insurer lowered its rates the following year, noting that workers "required less time in the hospital and used Dr. Wood's clinic for nearly all of their primary care," reported the *Journal*.

Wood's clinic isn't without its detractors, particularly among insurance companies that see prepaid physician plans as competition. But it hasn't deterred him. "I'll sign up one patient at a time if I have to," Wood told the *Journal*. "I can't see my practice surviving for the next 10 years without this model."

"Wal-Mart, for all the fire that labor activists direct at it, is quickly becoming the Henry Ford of health care."

Henry Ford didn't invent the automobile. He just found a way to mass-produce it, allowing him to sell an affordable, reliable form of transportation to middle-class Americans. Can twenty-first-century entrepreneurs do the same for health care, which seems defined by expensive, labor-intensive services? In a word, yes—by "unbundling" inexpensive services from expensive settings like hospitals and by moving from a reactive medical model that treats already sick patients (very expensive) to a predictive, personalized model that monitors patients for disease predispositions and keeps them healthy (far cheaper).

Wal-Mart, for all the fire that labor activists direct at it, is quickly becoming the Henry Ford of health care. It took a bold stride into health-care markets in 2006, rolling out a Florida pilot program offering dozens of generic drugs at just $4 for a month's supply. The program quickly spread to other states and added many new generics, including medicines for glaucoma, attention deficit disorder, fungal infections, and acne. As of May 2008, Wal-Mart estimates, the program has saved consumers over $1 billion in prescription drug costs. Competitors like Target and Kroger have rushed to match its offerings.

Another low-price, low-tech step toward shrinking health-care costs is the emergence of convenient-care clinics like RediClinic and MinuteClinic, which are housed in larger retail stores like Wal-Mart, Target, and CVS. The first convenient-care clinic, QuickMedx (later renamed MinuteClinic), opened in Minneapolis–Saint Paul in 2000 after its founder, Rick Krieger, couldn't find a doctor on short notice to administer a strep-throat test to his son. Wasn't there a better way, he wondered, to get fast, convenient care for simple illnesses? "We are not talking about diabetes, cancer, or heart disease," he told Harvard Business School researchers in 2002. "We are talking about colds, throat and ear infections."

The convenient-care clinics all use a similar model: offer a list of simple, low-cost health-care services for the consumer who can't see his regular physician or doesn't have one. The clinics keep prices down by offering care from a skilled nurse practitioner under the oversight of a licensed physician. Instead of skipping care or going to an emergency room, patients strapped for time or money can just head for a local store. As of November 2007, some 800 convenient-care clinics were operating across the U.S., up from 62 in 2006, with hundreds more planned.

Despite their popularity with consumers, the clinics have met with opposition from some state medical societies and groups within the American Medical Association that feel that the clinics fragment health care by preventing patients from developing long-term relationships with primary-care physicians. Web Golinkin, RediClinic's chief executive officer, believes that these concerns are greatly exaggerated. "The reality is that care is already fragmented," he says. Further, millions of Americans don't have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

primary-care physicians or have trouble accessing them, and millions more lack insurance; convenient-care clinics may not address all these patients' needs, but they can at least get them routine care and provide an entry point into the broader health-care system. "We see a lot of patients who are outside of our scope of practice," Golinkin acknowledges, "but we refer them back to their primary-care physicians if they have one and help them find one if they don't." He objects to the idea that patients must seek an expensive consultation for every medical condition: "Spending $200 or $250 to treat a consumer's strep throat is not a sustainable model."

Convenient-care clinics show a lot of promise, but state regulations that prohibit them outright or make it difficult for them to operate effectively are holding them back. "Probably the biggest hurdles are regulations of physician oversight of nurse practitioners," says Golinkin. Most states require such supervision, but some take the principle to an extreme by requiring doctors to be on site at the clinics or by severely limiting the number of nurses they can manage at one time. These regulations drive up clinic costs, making them unprofitable.

Other states strictly regulate who can own and operate the facilities. According to the California HealthCare Foundation, California laws "require ownership by local physicians who operate the health care facility"; as a result, the CHCF notes, "there are very few clinic operators or clinics in California," though MinuteClinic is trying to gain a foothold there. And even in California, promising early evidence suggests that convenient-care clinics, despite their scarcity, are changing the economics of basic health care. In May 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the state's largest physicians' association, HealthCare Partners Medical Group (with more than 500,000 patients), started posting prices—at a substantial markdown—for many common procedures, in a direct concession to competitive pressure from convenient-care clinics.

The really exciting strategies for controlling health-care costs are genetic technologies that will identify the tiny differences in DNA that make some people susceptible to various diseases, from diabetes to Alzheimer's. Myriad Genetics reports $100 million in revenue for a test that has told 150,000 female customers whether they carry the BRCA gene, which puts them at increased risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer. Another company, Navigenics, offers a $2,500 test called Health Compass that screens consumers for 20 conditions, including diabetes, prostate cancer, and obesity. "In five years, we will have a very large number of these gene tests," Kari Stefansson, who leads the biotech firm deCODE Genetics, told *Forbes*, "and they will be frequently used, at least by an educated portion of the population who will want to know."

Over the next 10 to 15 years, moreover, technology will offer Americans customized health-care solutions tailored to their individual genetic profiles—individualized regimens of exercise, diet, and drugs to ward off diseases far earlier and more effectively than is possible today. One small company that exemplifies the trends in personalized medicine is Genomas, which is exploring pharmacogenomics, or how drugs interact with people's genes to produce different reactions. Many patients taking common drugs—statins for high cholesterol, for instance, or antipsychotics for mental illness—have adverse reactions that lead them to switch medicines repeatedly or to stop taking them altogether. These actions can lead to more expensive health complications, like heart attacks. Some experts estimate that about 2 million serious adverse drug reactions may occur every year, producing 100,000 deaths and billions of dollars in excess health-care costs. Genomas's technology, which it calls PhyzioType, may help physicians and insurers predict common side effects and realize huge savings. (One study has found that effective genetic testing for a single blood-thinning drug, warfarin, could help patients avoid "85,000 serious bleeding events and 17,000 strokes annually," reducing costs by $1.1 billion.)

The field remains in its infancy. Some voice concerns about the quality of the science linking newly discovered genes with complex conditions

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like heart disease or diabetes, and worry that fly-by-night companies will just hand patients test results without any counseling about what they mean. These concerns are legitimate but not insurmountable—and it's easy to see how powerful market applications will emerge. Patients with a family history of chronic ailments like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, for example, might gladly pay extra for an insurance package that included genetic counseling and guidance on which drugs were likely to offer the best outcomes and the least risk of dangerous side effects.

"Technology will soon offer Americans customized health-care solutions tailored to genetic profiles."

To unleash the full promise of these new technologies and business models, policymakers should deregulate the market for medical products and services while liberating consumer demand. Congress should give individuals the same tax deduction for the purchase of health insurance that employers now have. Also, because each state currently requires any insurer doing business in that state to cover certain mandated services—driving up the cost of basic health insurance—we should create a national market for health insurance, perhaps through an optional federal charter (as now exists for banks) or through direct cross-border sales. This increase in individually owned insurance and real market competition would encourage companies to offer a broad mix of new health-care services and insurance products that cater to consumers' real needs at prices they can afford. As the insurance environment became defined by individuals purchasing their own portable coverage, employers, unions, and hospitals would become trusted health-care intermediaries and help patients navigate the system.

In 2003, Congress enacted a moratorium on Medicare payments to physician-owned hospitals that has since expired, though opponents keep trying to resurrect it. It should stay dead, thus encouraging health professionals to explore new venues for patient care and create new bundles of health-care services. Doctors, convenient-care clinics, and specialty hospitals could then compete for customers in a wide variety of health-care settings. There isn't one store for electronics, and there's no reason that there should be one venue, or just a few, for health care.

Today, you don't have to pick up a science-fiction novel to envision the future of health care. Convenient-care clinics already offer a wide range of basic health-care services at affordable prices; more services—perhaps including genetic testing—are sure to follow, with the results flowing back to a patient's primary-care physician in an electronic health record that is reliable, secure, and easy to use. Doctors who are now overwhelmed and underpaid will opt out of insurance for most basic services in return for prepaid primary-care agreements that offer patients more convenience and better care at affordable prices. Waiting at a doctor's office or an emergency room for basic care will decline, replaced by access to your primary-care physician through e-mail and even cell phone. Entrepreneurs will mine reams of information to help devise state-of-the-art patient-care regimens for complex diseases like cancer, helping patients in small Iowa towns get the quality of care currently available only at academic hospitals in Boston or New York. Patients will pay for many more basic services out of tax-exempt health savings accounts (HSAs), driving continuous competition and innovation. Finally, advances in genetics will enable doctors to match patients with treatment regimens that give them the best chance of avoiding unwanted side effects and maximizing good outcomes.

In short, from HSAs to DNA, we'll be matching the right treatment to the right patient at the right price, and we'll be restoring patients to the center of medical decisions—which is where they belong.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Urbanities

Benjamin Franklin: City Slicker

Jerry Weinberger

The self-styled country mouse was in truth America's first great urbanist.

"I'm tired of this dirty old city," sang country-music great Merle Haggard, probably referring to his hometown of Bakersfield, California, southern anchor of the San Joaquin Valley:

> Entirely too much work
> and never enough play.
> And I'm tired of these
> dirty old sidewalks.
> Think I'll walk off my
> steady job today.
> Turn me loose, set me
> free, somewhere in the
> middle of Montana . . .

Merle's singing an old American tune here. From the Founders to Thoreau to modern Farm Aid concerts, Americans have been of two minds about the city and the country. For some, the city means progress, prosperity, and the development of mind and culture, and the country means the opposite. For others, the country means virtue, tradition, and freedom, and the city means the opposite.

Benjamin Franklin was reported to have said, at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, that his fellow Founders must "all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." Hang together the Founders did. But they didn't do so forever, and, after independence and a workable constitution, they soon divided (the vast complexities duly noted) on the issue of city versus country. On the one hand were the Federalist proponents of banks, commerce, manufactures, and cities; on the other, the Democratic-Republican proponents of Jefferson's agrarian ideals.

Franklin didn't live to see this division play out, but it's my guess that he would have sided with the city, albeit with subtle reservations. Franklin is often referred to as "the first American." That's true enough. But you might go further, and say that Franklin was also America's first city slicker.

Sure, Franklin often presented himself as a country mouse or a small-town boy bewildered in the big city. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin recounts his youthful flight from conservative Boston to more metropolitan Philadelphia. Grubby from his journey and almost broke, he cut a ridiculous figure as he walked into town in 1723. So disreputable was his appearance that he feared people would take him for a runaway apprentice (which, by the way, he was). Franklin describes how Sir William Keith, the colonial governor of Pennsylvania, later tricked him, "a poor ignorant boy," into believing that letters of credit were forthcoming to him in London for the purchase of printing equipment. They weren't, and in 1724 Franklin found himself high and dry in one of the biggest cities in the world.

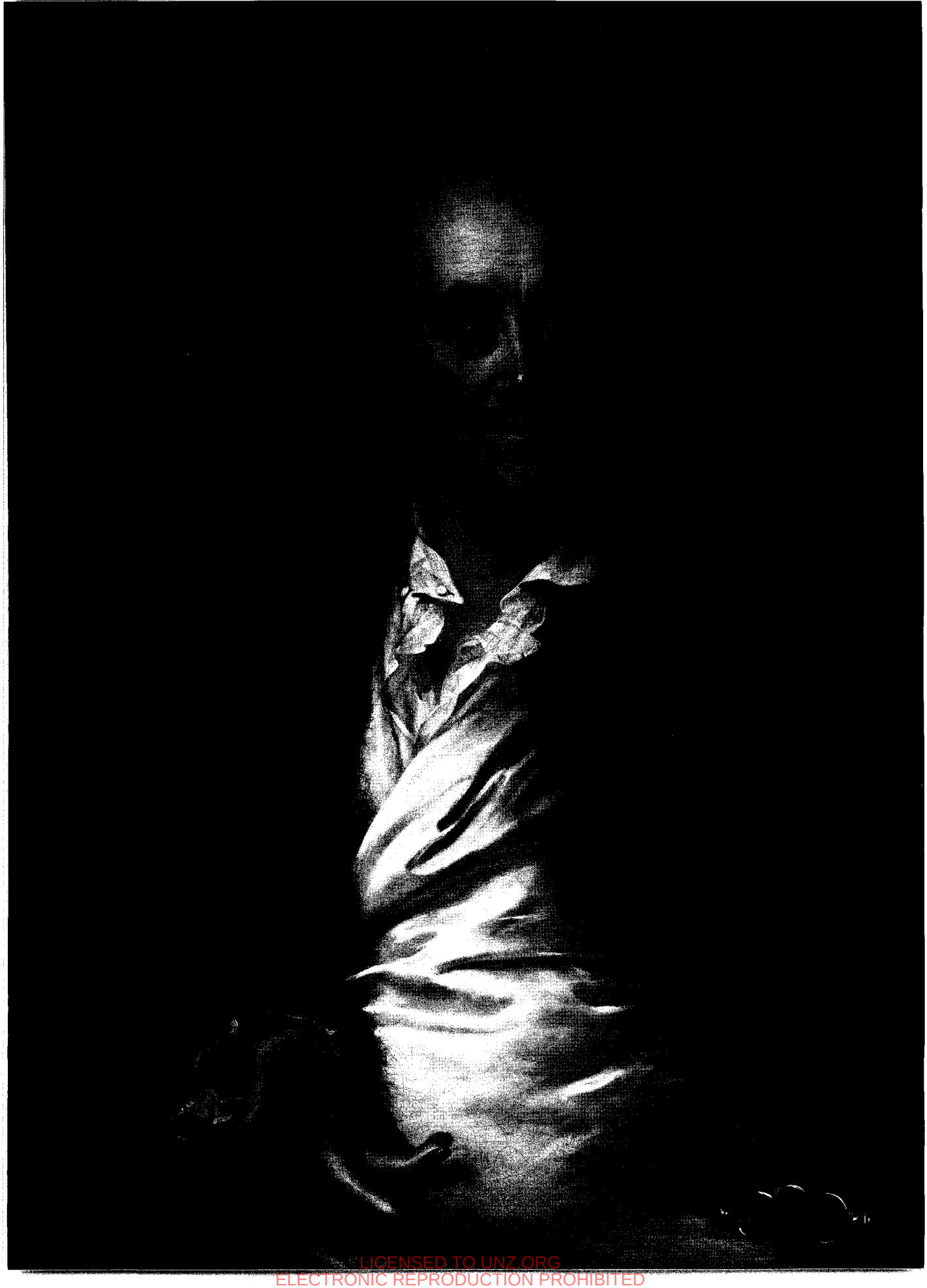
Later in his career, in 1755, Franklin proved his competence in the countryside, leading a dangerous mission west of Philadelphia to build forts to guard against Indian predations during the French and Indian War. Still later, while serving as his country's ambassador in Paris during the American Revolution, he affected the dress and manner of a simple Quaker: a dull coat and a fur cap atop stringy, unpowdered hair. The French ate it up. Franklin was the ultimate American: an unaffected, uncitified, and natural man. He even had some bad things to say about cities, recognizing the appeal of Africans' and American Indians' simpler lives.

But there's no doubt that for Franklin, the good life meant life in the city. Franklin made his way by means of book learning, wit, social savvy, and ability to hobnob with the rich, famous, and powerful—all assets valued in urban society.

ANNE-ROSALIE BOCQUET FILLEUL/THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART/ART RESOURCE, NY

Franklin in the late 1770s, elegant and sophisticated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As he describes himself in the *Autobiography*, the first of these took some hard work: he became at a very young age as learned as it was possible to be in his time. By the age of 16, and with the aid of only two years of formal education, he had read more widely in the literature of Western culture, including the thinkers of the Enlightenment, than most professors on a university campus today. He also taught himself to write, first by imitating favorite authors and the sophisticated style of the British *Spectator*, and then by developing his own brilliant and often comic literary voice.

So when Franklin, at 17, ran out on his printing indentures (a serious felony) and fled from Boston to Philadelphia, he was hardly the "poor ignorant boy" he purported to be. In fact, Franklin's vibrant pen was what brought him to Keith's attention—the governor had seen a letter the young man had written to his brother-in-law and was impressed by its elegant expression. Not long after, Franklin's bookishness also drew the attention of New York's governor, William Burnet, who invited him to spend a day at his house conversing about authors. As Franklin writes with delicious irony: "This was the second Governor who had done me the Honor to take Notice of me, which to a poor Boy like me was very pleasing."

Young Franklin may have been left in the lurch in London, but that didn't keep him from finding employment—in Samuel Palmer's printing house—or from delighting in (and spending most of his money on) the city's urbanities, especially books and "plays and other places of amusement." Nor did it stop him from writing and printing a pamphlet entitled *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*, which argued that virtue, vice, and free will are all illusions and that, as a consequence, no particular providence exists—no God, that is, who cares for individual human beings or punishes and rewards them for their behavior. (Franklin would later burn most of the copies of this scandalous tract, claiming it had "an ill tendency.") The pamphlet shocked Palmer, who nevertheless noted, like Keith, that Franklin was "a young man of some ingenuity." It eventually came to the attention of surgeon and philosopher William Lyons, who introduced its author to a club presided over by Bernard Mandeville of *Fable of the Bees* fame. Through Lyons, Franklin also met the mathematician and writer Henry Pemberton, who had edited the third edition of Isaac Newton's *Principia*. Pemberton promised to introduce Franklin to Newton, but that connection, of which Franklin "was extremely desirous," never worked out.

Still, young Franklin understood the game of making connections, so crucial to thriving in the city. When he had sailed from Philadelphia to London, for instance, he had taken with him a small purse made of asbestos. In a letter dated June 2, 1725, he wrote to the great naturalist Sir Hans Sloane, offering it for sale. If Sloane had any inclination to buy it, Franklin said, he could let him know "by a line directed to me at the Golden Fan." Franklin's move paid off: he got to meet the famous Sloane at his house in Bloomsbury, got to see Sloane's natural-history collection, and was paid handsomely for the purse, which is now in the British Museum. (In the *Autobiography*, Franklin immodestly omits his active role in making this connection, saying that Sloane had somehow heard about the purse and spontaneously approached *him* to buy it.)

Franklin energetically kept up the networking when he got back to Philadelphia in 1726. Sometimes the connection was with someone older and wealthy and powerful, such as the famous lawyer Andrew Hamilton, speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly. Hamilton took a shine to Franklin and steered important public printing jobs his way. Sometimes the connections were with bright people his own age, such as Robert Grace, "a young Gentleman of some Fortune, generous & witty, a lover of Punning and his Friends," and William Coleman, "who had the coolest clearest Head, the best Heart, and the exactest Morals, of almost any Man I ever met with." Without a loan from Grace and Coleman,

THE ART ARCHIVE/CULVER PICTURES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Franklin networks with Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

Franklin would have missed the chance to buy the printing firm with which he eventually made his fortune. On other occasions, the connection came (again) through something Franklin wrote, as when his pamphlet favoring paper money landed him the job of printing the dough after the assembly signed on to the idea, or through a position, as when his appointment as the assembly's clerk led to yet more jobs printing public documents.

Franklin also exhibited psychological skills far beyond any mere country bumpkin's. Seeking a second term as clerk, for instance, he was opposed by a rich and talented new assembly member who proposed a different candidate for the post. Franklin won the job, but he didn't like the threat that the member would pose to his pocketbook in the future. Rather than gaining the man's favor by paying servile respect, however, Franklin wrote a note asking to borrow "a certain very scarce and curious book" that he knew the rich man owned. The man sent the book immediately. Franklin read it and returned it a week later with another note, this one "expressing strongly" his "sense of the favor." The assemblyman "ever afterwards manifested a readiness" to serve Franklin and remained a lifelong friend. It was another instance, Franklin believed, of the truth that "he that hath once done you a Kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged." Now *that's* city slick.

By the time Franklin was rich enough to retire from printing—in 1748, at the age of 42—his political, philosophical, and scientific careers were well under way. A decade later, he was Doctor Franklin, the second most famous scientist in the world after Newton. He returned to London in 1757 as an agent for the assembly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and would spend all but eight of his remaining 33 years either there or in Paris. He became a regular figure in London's club scene and ran with an intellectual set that included such luminaries as Joseph Priestly, James Boswell, and David Hume. His residence on Craven Street soon emerged as a center of diplomacy, a gathering place for intellectuals, and a cutting-edge scientific laboratory. (The house, adjacent to Charing Cross, has been restored, and one can visit it today.) Franklin's correspondence made it clear that he loved London and relished the friends and acquaintances that he could—and did—make there.

The same proved true for Paris, where Franklin worked tirelessly to persuade the French monarchy to bankrupt itself in support of a republican revolution in America. Franklin took the city by storm: he became rock-star famous and made groupies of the cream of Parisian society. In 1779, he wrote to his daughter that his face was now as well-known in Paris as the man in the moon's, so common were the medallions, pictures, and prints of his "phiz." He was now something of a god—"I-dolized," he observed, not mentioning that some who doubted his divinity painted that phiz on the inside of chamber pots. Among the doubters was John Adams, who couldn't stand Old Ben, in part because he was too much at home in Paris. Franklin had no religion, Adams said later to the French statesman François Barbé-Marbois, and "all the atheists, deists, and libertines, as well as the philosophers and ladies, are in his train—another Voltaire."

As in London, Franklin relished the social and intellectual life of the city, and enjoyed even more his saucy relationships with its young ladies, such as Madame Brillon, and its older ones, such as Madame Helvétius, widow of the famed philosophe, to whom he unsuccessfully proposed. The ladies loved him, too. To see why, spend some time with Anne-Rosalie Bocquet Filleul's famous portrait of Franklin (which you can do if you go to the traveling Franklin tercentenary exhibition—or see page 103). It captures the attractiveness that he must have exuded to the beautiful and intelligent women around him. He's sexy, he's got gorgeous blue eyes, there's just the hint of an ironic smile, and he's in dishabille.

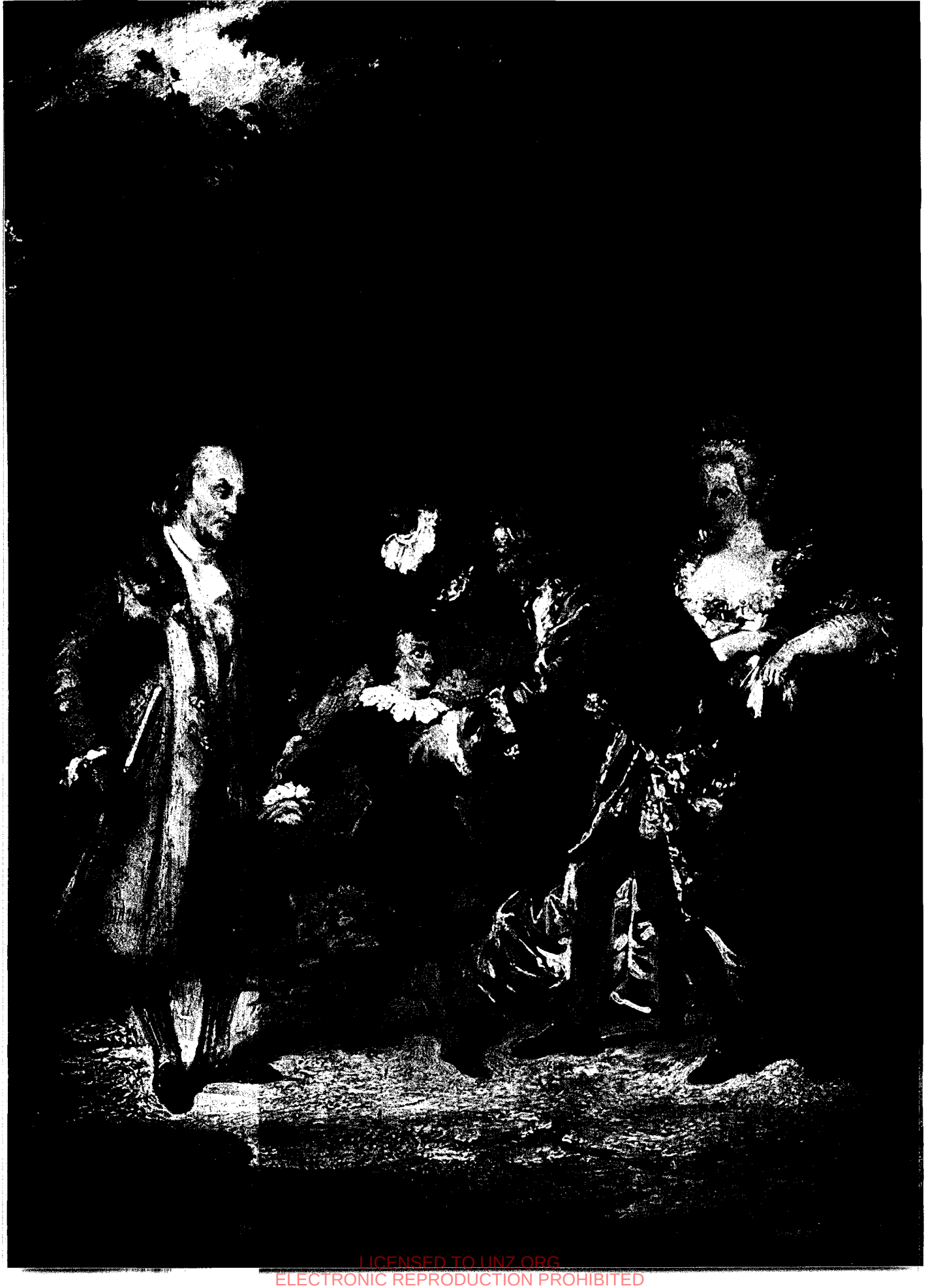
Indeed, Franklin preferred his life in the big cities abroad to life back home in Philadelphia with his plodding wife, Deborah, who died in 1774 while Franklin was in London. In one revealing bagatelle sent to Madame Helvétius, Franklin suggested marriage to the elegant and witty widow by way of a joke at his late wife's expense—describing her as up in heaven and teamed up romantically with none other than the dead philosophe. But nobody's perfect, and city gents as slick and gifted as Franklin sometimes do prefer downtown to down home.

Before concluding that Franklin was just a super-gifted social butterfly, though, remember that the reform work he did for the cities he lived in was as important as any in the century. Franklin didn't just like the big city; he also cared for it. Much of his work was cultural: in Philadelphia, he started an intellectual society, the Junto; set up the first lending library; and—famously until this day—was the driving force for the foundation of the University of Pennsylvania and the American Philosophical Society. And in Paris, Franklin printed and circulated American state constitutions for the sake of political enlightenment. He also lent his shoulder to the wheel of medical progress, allowing a royal commission to use his Passy residence for the blind experiments that disproved the theory of animal magnetism and so proved its inventor and proponent, Franz Mesmer, to whom huge sums were paid by rich patients, a quack. In a letter to the physician La Sablière de la Condamine, Franklin ascribed Mesmer's success to "there being so many disorders which cure themselves and such a disposition in mankind to deceive themselves and one another on these occasions." Which

John Adams denounced Franklin as "another Voltaire"; here, the philosophe welcomes his American counterpart.

EUGENE DEVERIA/THE ART ARCHIVE/MUSÉE SAINT DENIS REIMS/GIANNI DAGLI ORTI

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wasn't to say that such quackery might not have its uses, Franklin said, for in every rich city there are a lot of hypochondriacs. If they stopped gulping medicines for the sake of being cured by the doctor's finger or an iron rod, "they may possibly find good effects though they mistake the cause."

But Franklin also labored to reduce the two greatest dangers of city life at the time: fire and disease. In 1736, he wrote and published an article on the common causes of fires, and he organized Philadelphia's first volunteer fire department. (This was long before his monumental invention of the lightning rod—the better to prevent fires in the first place.) And in 1751, he saw a plan through the Pennsylvania Assembly—by way of some legislative shenanigans and the invention of the matching grant—to build the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia. In an essay supporting the project, Franklin extolled economies of scale, pointing out the concentration of talent and the medical innovation that attend the big-city hospital. (I'd bet that the best place to get sick is still in or near a big city, not in rural or small-town America.)

Another urban inconvenience: Philadelphia was dark at night. The problem, Franklin figured out, was that the city's ill-designed streetlamps, supplied from England, became useless in a single evening from accumulated soot and broke too easily when cleaned—as had to be done daily. Franklin designed a new lamp with better ventilation and removable panes of glass that made for easy cleaning and easy replacement. Philadelphia nights grew brighter. And the city could be dangerous at night as well, so Franklin proposed a reform, eventually effected, of its inefficient and corrupt constabulary.

And then there were the dirty old sidewalks that sent Merle Haggard packing off to the middle of Montana. Not long before he left Philadelphia for London in 1757, Franklin, "by talking and writing on the subject," was able to improve the paving in Jersey Market—the other streets in the city still being unpaved, quagmires in the wet and dusty in the dry—only to find that both shoes and wheels, muddied as they were from getting to the market, would soon cover the new paving with "mire" dropped by horses. So he spurred a collective effort to pay for cleaning the market. The episode led to a bill, eventually successful, that Franklin introduced in the assembly for paving all the city's streets.

Sophisticated London's streets weren't all that tidy, either. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin relates a proposal for cleaning them that he sent to his friend John Fothergill. The proposal was ingenious: clean the streets each morning before the shops open (the objection to daily cleaning was that the dust would fly into houses and shops), use special sleds that drain water from the sludge, and, whenever possible, use a central gutter for collecting the filth rather than gutters on the side of the street. With a single gutter, Franklin argued, the runoff from the rain creates a current twice as strong as a side gutter's and sufficient to wash away the accumulated muck.

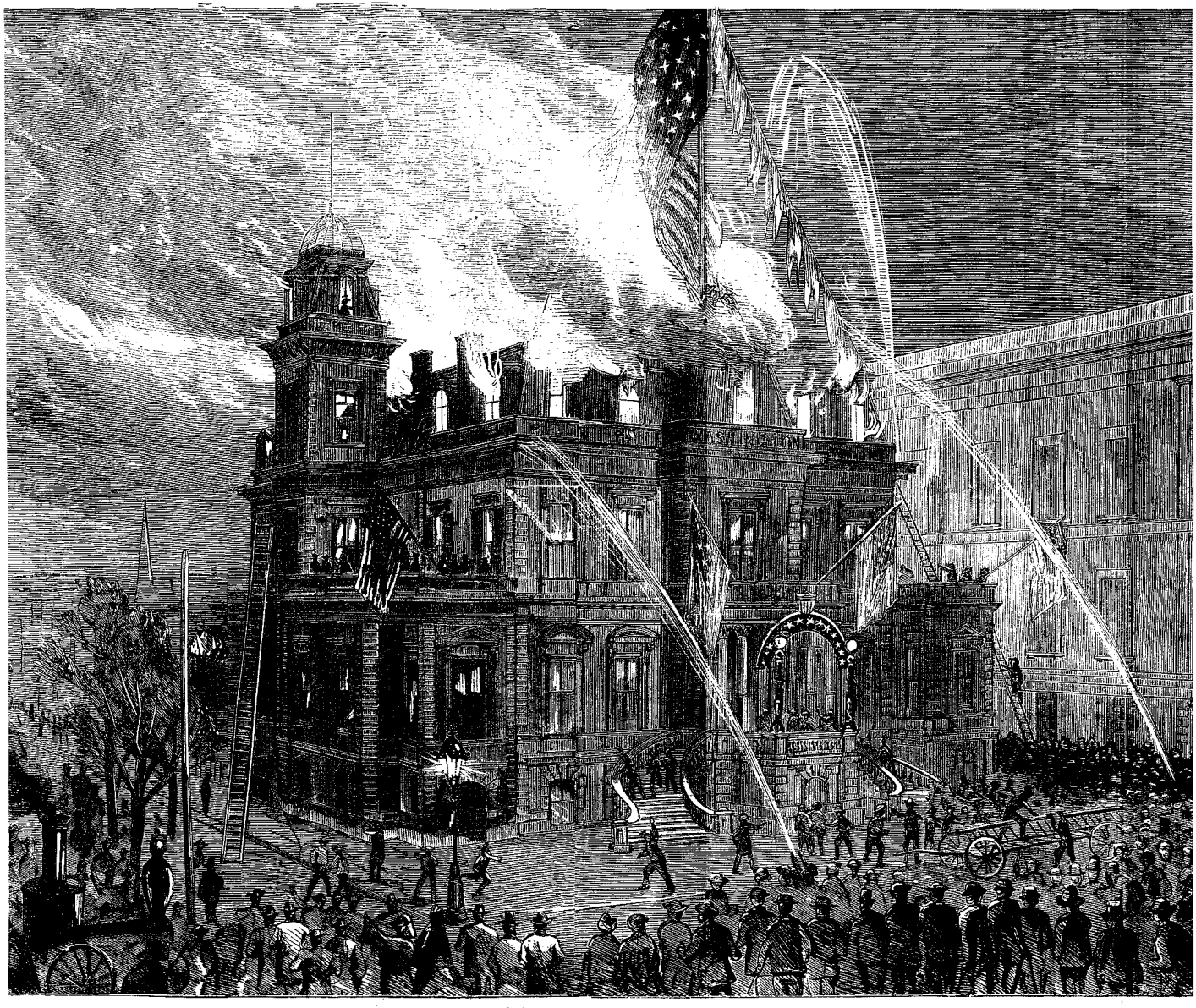
Franklin observes that some people may think these matters trifling. While it's true, he says, that dust blown into a single shop or an eye isn't a very big deal, "yet the great Number of instances in a populous City, and its frequent Repetitions give it Weight & Consequence." It's not right, then, "to censure very severely those who bestow some of Attention to Affairs of this seemingly low Nature." It's clear that Franklin would have agreed with Rudy Giuliani about New York's once-broken windows.

CORBIS

Franklin and Giuliani have another thing in common. In 1764, during Franklin's two-year return from London, Philadelphia was menaced by a violent lower-class mob, furious at what they viewed as neglect of their defense against Indian predations. Defying proclamations by John Penn—the governor and a political enemy of Franklin's—the mob went on a murderous rampage against peaceful and defenseless Indians and then threatened to march on Philadelphia to kill the Indians under protection in the city.

Response to the affair divided along class lines: the Quaker

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



BURNING OF THE UNION LEAGUE BUILDING IN PHILADELPHIA—RESCUE OF THE FLAG BY FIREMEN. [See Page 508.]

Franklin organized Philadelphia's first volunteer fire department, fighting one of the greatest dangers to city life at the time.

and Anglican parties (including Franklin) backed the Indians, while the Presbyterians, Lutherans, and urban and border-dwelling poor took the mob's side. Facing an imminent disaster, the panicked governor lost his head and ran for help to Franklin, who took over the whole affair—rallying public opinion in the city, forging an armed force to confront the mob, and joining the delegation that persuaded the rabble not to move on the city. Had Franklin been in New York City on September 11, 2001, it's easy to imagine him calming, guiding, and comforting his fellow citizens.

"America the Beautiful" has lots to say about our spacious skies, waves of grain, and purple mountains, but just one ridiculous thing about our cities: that their alabaster gleam is undimmed by human tears. The reference here is to the White City of the 1892–93 Chicago World's Fair. No tears? The Windy City's mayor, Carter Harrison, was assassinated a few days before the fair closed, America's first lunatic serial killer was on the loose in Chicago, and the White City itself burned in 1894, most likely at an arsonist's hands. The song's urban optimism, then, seems just as blind as Merle Haggard's urban pessimism. Or so Ben Franklin—who loved the metropolis, warts and all—would surely believe.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Living Black-and-White

Stefan Kanfer

The old classics retain a vitality and beauty that color can't provide.

The civics teacher had an inspired idea: bring American jurisprudence to life by showing the class an award-winning 1957 film. *Twelve Angry Men* had all the requisites of instructive high drama: suspense, as one juror tries to change the minds of 11 others hell-bent on sending the accused to death row; crackling dialogue, written by Reginald Rose, a luminary of television's Golden Age; a scintillating cast, led by Henry Fonda and directed by Sidney Lumet. The title flashed on-screen—immediately followed by a chorus of groans. One 15-year-old wailed for all his disappointed colleagues: "You didn't tell us it was going to be in black-and-white!"

The place was New Rochelle High School in Westchester, New York, but the same scene could have played across the United States. The owner of my local video-rental place puts it succinctly: "Most of our customers are under 30. The way they see it, life is in color, so why not movies? Which is why we stopped offering black-and-whites, except for the classics. You know, Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, *Citizen Kane*, *Casablanca*, *Schindler's List*, maybe a couple of Woody Allens."

If that's the current standard, libraries will soon begin removing volumes of poetry from their shelves. After all, life is in prose, so why not books? Alas, what the customers don't realize is that B&W cinema remains vital, and often beautiful, because it's *not* a reflection of everyday existence.

Still, youthful viewers' resistance is forgivable: they're merely recapitulating biology. Our retinas have two main components, rods and cones. Rods (about 3 million per orb) can perceive only black, white, and shades of gray, but that's enough to keep us from tripping over the furniture in a darkened room. As soon as the lights snap on, 120 million cones take over. Their job: to register red, yellow, blue, and every hue in between—and we forget how important the rods were just moments before.

This is the story of American cinema, encapsulated. Black-and-white film was Hollywood's principal offering from the silent era to the late 1930s. Then, curious ticket buyers began flocking to rainbows like *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*—the Technicolor era had opened. Confined to lower budgets, B&W producers and directors battled back. Emphasizing narrative, they came up with fresh pictorial techniques: stark, angular shots; tight close-ups of the stars; backgrounds that evoked a vital sense of place. En route, they insisted on lean, incisive scenarios and musical scores that enhanced every emotion from pathos to hilarity. The good fight continued until the early 1960s, when filmmakers finally ran up the white (and black) flag. From that point on, color reigned supreme.

Screenwriter Daniel Fuchs wrote of the B&W era: "An excitement filled the theater, a thralldom. People forgot they were sitting on the seats; they forgot themselves, their bodies. They lived only for the film." Gregg Toland, the greatest cinematographer of his generation, never shot in color. He and his A-picture directors, including John Ford, Orson Welles, and William Wyler, preferred to give audiences the sense that they were watching a suite of etchings. Who needed color when the haunting landscapes of *Wuthering Heights* materialized on screen, as if photographed in Emily Brontë's nineteenth century? Or when *Citizen Kane*'s deep-focus montages breathed life into the story of a fatally ambitious press lord? Or when *The Best Years of Our Lives* made an American

In horror films like *Dracula* (1931), ominous shadows suggested profound evil, reaching deep into viewers' psyches.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/PHOTOFEST

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

epic out of the interrupted lives of three World War II vets?

Toland came to prominence when Technicolor was a rarity. But the greatest cinematographer of *his* generation, Conrad Hall (*In Cold Blood, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*), worked in both media. He came to dislike color because it tended "to be very unreal, to detract from the story. Whereas with black-and-white, there's no way to detract, once you accept it, which is right at the beginning."

The Western bears him out. Oaters would seem to need wide blue skies and panoramic Technicolor shots of Monument Valley. Yet it was two B&W Westerns that set the genre's style: *High Noon*, with Gary Cooper as a stoic sheriff forced to face evil alone; and *Red River*, starring John Wayne as the domineering boss of a cattle drive. That film prefigured Wayne the intractable conservative—deeply suspicious of youth (in this case, Montgomery Clift)—who would go on to codirect the pro–Vietnam War movie *The Green Berets*. Not long after *Red River* wrapped, someone encouraged Wayne to take a more nuanced look at politics. The superstar exploded: "They tell me everything isn't black-and-white. I say, why the hell not?"

Comedy is another genre with deep B&W roots. A huge number of the last century's most important comedians established themselves in black-and-white: Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, the Marx Brothers, Jack Benny, Carole Lombard, Jimmy Durante, Jean Harlow, Bob Hope, Lucille Ball, Jackie Gleason, Abbott and Costello, Rosalind Russell, Jerry Lewis—the list of pantheon figures goes on for pages. As soon as color arrived, though, clowns wound up on the sidelines. Jimmy Durante now played second banana to Esther Williams's water spectaculars; Danny Kaye, MGM's brightest comic star, found himself interrupted by chorus lines of Goldwyn Girls; Bob Hope, so funny with Bing Crosby in the *Road* pictures, became a leering embarrassment in such tinted, tasteless features as *Call Me Bwana* and *I'll Take Sweden*.

Many dreary farces came in black-and-white, of course, but the great comedies have never been equaled. In 2000, the American Film Institute published a movie list entitled "100 Years, 100 Laughs." Nearly half were in B&W—and they remain the funniest, ranging from *It Happened One Night*, with Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, to the immortal *Bank Dick*, with W. C. Fields, to Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*, an audacious anti-Nazi comedy starring Benny and Lombard. A gross Technicolor remake, directed by Mel Brooks and starring Brooks and Anne Bancroft, bombed 40 years later.

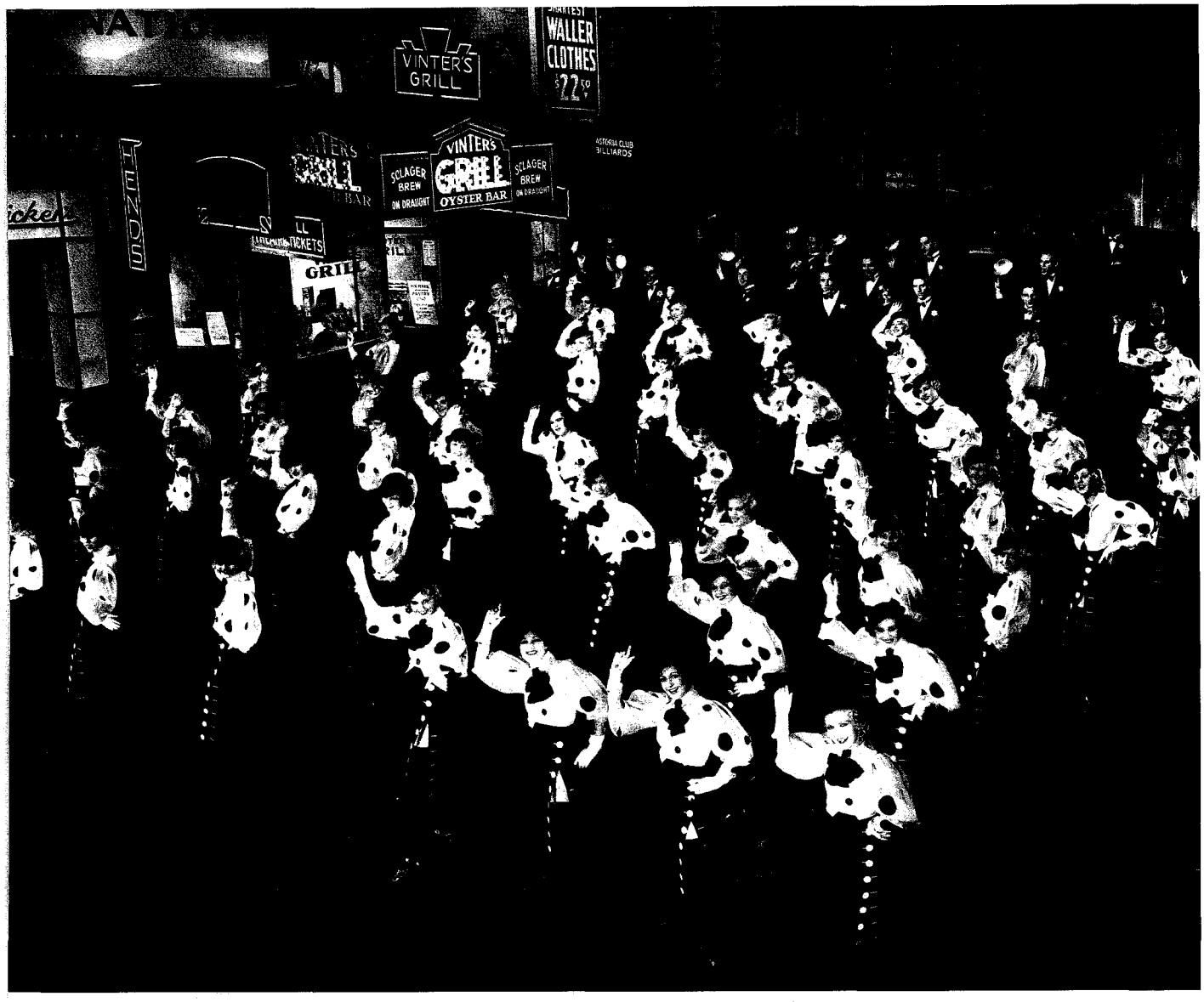
As for musicals, sure, you can name glorious Technicolor examples—adaptations of Broadway fare like *The Music Man*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Oliver!*, along with such originals as *Singin' in the Rain* and *An American in Paris*. Yet even these take second place to nine black-and-white Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers movies. Almost every great songwriter journeyed west to work with Astaire in the pre-color period, among them Irving Berlin, the Gershwins, and Cole Porter. Berlin, usually parsimonious with praise, said, "You give Fred Astaire a song, and you could forget about it. If he did change anything, he made it better."

So did Rogers. Astaire danced with other women in other movies, but the magic was no longer there. No matter how farcical or chaotic the plot, Astaire and Rogers established an island of elegance and passion. Their dancing "was a vehicle of serious emotion between a man and a woman," dance critic Arlene Croce observed. "It never happened in the movies again."

Other musical events never happened in the movies again, among them Busby Berkeley's lavish ballets. In the early 1930s, cameras whirred so loudly that they had to be encased in cumbersome, soundproof boxes, which limited choreographers. Berkeley had his musical numbers prerecorded in a studio, leaving him free to place the cameras wherever his imagination wandered: in the air, on the wall, in a swimming pool. Dancers arranged in geometric patterns became Berkeley's signature

WARNER BROTHERS/PHOTOFEST

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



***42nd Street* (1933) was one of several hit Busby Berkeley musicals in the B&W era.**

and transfigured Warner Brothers movie musicals from *42nd Street* until the advent of color, after which Berkeley's career rapidly deteriorated. One can still detect his influence in the stage work of director Susan Strohman, notably in the Broadway productions of *The Producers* and *Young Frankenstein*.

But comedies and musicals are only a part of the B&W period—and not the most influential part. Screen biographies ("biopics" in trade jargon) burgeoned in the modern color era, and sometimes the filmmakers got them in focus (*Patton*, for example); far more often, though, the Hollywood assembly line has churned out Technicolor mistakes like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No genre was made more for black-and-white than film noir. Here, Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity* (1944), a disturbing tale of murder and betrayal.

Richard Attenborough's *Chaplin*, which never captured its subject's genius. An earlier Hollywood, by contrast, knew how to do the biopic right, especially the patriotic kind (these days, major studios would rather set fire to their back lots than produce a pro-American film). During World War II, for instance, Warner Brothers released *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, centered on the life of composer/performer George M. Cohan and featuring James Cagney in a magnetic, strutting performance. "It seems it always happens," observes Cagney as Cohan. "Whenever we get too high-hat and too sophisticated for flag-waving, some thug nation decides we're a pushover all ready to be blackjacked. And it isn't long before we're looking up, mighty anxiously, to be sure the flag's still waving over us."

Sergeant York, with Gary Cooper as a World War I hero,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was another black-and-white example of triumphant *biographica Americana*. So were two stirring films on the country's most prodigious inventor—*Young Tom Edison*, with Mickey Rooney in the title role, and *Edison the Man*, starring Spencer Tracy as the grownup genius—and three movies about our most beloved president: *Abraham Lincoln*, with Walter Huston; *Young Mr. Lincoln*, with Henry Fonda; and finally, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, a Raymond Massey vehicle. Massey spent the rest of his life doing variations on the Lincoln theme; jealous rivals said he wouldn't be happy until someone assassinated him.

Paul Muni, who never appeared in a Technicolor film, was the master of the biopic, vanishing into whatever personality he chose to impersonate. The multilingual actor, who came to the U.S. as a child, had been a master mimic since his days in the Yiddish theater. In his thirties, he went through a naturalization ceremony, speaking in a heavy *Mitteleuropa* accent, squinting as if he didn't quite understand each question. During the interrogation, his accent slowly diminished. He delivered the final answer in impeccable English. Muni smiled at the dumbfounded official. "Your honor, it's remarkable. Now that you've made me a citizen, I can speak perfectly!" He showcased his versatility as a Mexican president in *Juarez*, a French novelist in *The Life of Emile Zola*, and a French scientist in *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, for which he won an Academy Award.

Muni proved so good that he spawned many imitators—frequently miscast. Films like *A Song to Remember*, starring a vigorous Cornel Wilde as the consumptive Pole Frédéric Chopin, and *Night and Day*, with Cary Grant as a heterosexual Cole Porter, may have prompted Jack Warner's remark, "Every time Paul Muni parts his beard and looks through a microscope, we lose a million dollars." If Muni was the classic underplayer, Charles Laughton went over the top with B&W impressions in *Rembrandt* and *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Hollywood both admired and feared Laughton, who could lurch from low-key to manic in a nanosecond. After *Jamaica Inn* wrapped, Alfred Hitchcock sighed, "You can't direct a Laughton picture. The best you can hope for is to referee."

The actor became his own referee when MGM let him direct one film, 1955's *The Night of the Hunter*, which has become a B&W cult classic. Critic Roger Ebert considers the story of a tattooed religious maniac (Robert Mitchum) and the widow he terrorizes (Shelley Winters) "one of the greatest of American films . . . an expressionist oddity, telling its chilling story through visual fantasy."

Hunter crept close to one of the most vital B&W genres: horror. Back in the day, blood ran black, faces were pale even before they registered fright, and studio art directors had to create Transylvanian castles out of whole cloth and two-by-fours. In *The Bad and the Beautiful*, the second-best black-and-white film about Hollywood, producer Jonathan Shields (Kirk Douglas) lets Fred Amiel (Barry Sullivan) in on a secret:

> Shields: Put five men dressed like cats on the screen—what do they look like?
>
> Amiel: Like five men dressed like cats.
>
> Shields: When an audience pays to see a picture like this, what do they pay for?
>
> Amiel: To get the pants scared off 'em.
>
> Shields: And what scares the human race more than any other single thing?
>
> Amiel: The dark.
>
> Shields: Of course, and why? Because the dark has a life of its own. In the dark, all sorts of things come alive.
>
> Amiel: Yeah. Suppose we never do show the cat men. Is that what you're thinking?
>
> Shields: Exactly. . . . Now, what'll we put on the screen that'll make the backs of their necks crawl?
>
> Amiel: Two eyes shining in the dark.
>
> Shields: A dog frightened, growling, showing its fangs.
>
> Amiel: A bird, its neck broken, feathers torn from its throat.

UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD/CORBIS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Shields: A little girl screaming, claw marks down her cheeks.

The scene shifts to a child actress caterwauling in the setting that they've just described. The horror film turns out to be a smash.

The outstanding B&W horror films always suggested more than they showed, and those ominous hints allowed them to reach deep into the viewer's psyche. Parodists have gotten a lot of mileage out of Béla Lugosi's lines in *Dracula*: "My blood now flows through her veins. She will live through the centuries to come, as I have lived." And: "To die . . . to be really dead . . . that must be *glooorious*." But no actor has come close to Béla's unique amalgam of nobility and evil, his narrow eyes lit by tiny spotlights, his Hungarian intonations suggesting bottomless pits of depravity.

Similarly, dozens of actors have played Frankenstein's monster. None, however, could convey the pathos of William Henry Pratt, a Canadian who wisely changed his name to the more exotic Boris Karloff. The creature was mute in the original film, but in the compelling sequel, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, he uttered a few words. "We belong dead!" continues to be quoted as the expression of a contemporary terror—the fear that scientists are on the verge of creating a genetic nightmare in their laboratories.

The horror field is rich with B&W curios. Few viewers under 50 are aware that Spencer Tracy played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde opposite Ingrid Bergman; that the handsome leading man Tyrone Power did his best work as a geek (someone who bites off the heads of living chickens to horrify audiences) in *Nightmare Alley*; and that *Freaks*, the story of deformed circus performers, was so graphic that Britain banned it for 30 years.

Other than specialists like James Whale (*Frankenstein*) and Todd Browning (*Dracula*), only a handful of talented directors ventured onto this exotic turf. Hitchcock was one. He characterized his job as "simply to scare the hell out of people," and after creating frissons with such stylish color films as *North by Northwest*, he set to work on a B&W piece about the strange goings-on at the Bates Motel. *Psycho* turned Hollywood tradition on its ear. The director knocked off the star, Janet Leigh, in the first third of the movie, leaving viewers nonplussed. Then, with a combination of weird camera perspectives, menacing shadows, and Bernard Herrmann's eerie score, he did indeed scare the hell out of people. The original *Psycho*, produced for $800,000, grossed $10 million. Unfortunately, it also encouraged a slew of lesser talents to make Technicolor trash like *Halloween* and other hackneyed screamers.

Film noir got its name from French cineastes. The term refers to hard-edged, downbeat movies, with iconic heroes and antiheroes, "bad girl" temptresses, and a brooding, dangerous atmosphere. More than 60 years after it was made, the quintessential noir movie remains *Double Indemnity*, director Billy Wilder's adaptation of James M. Cain's thriller of betrayal. The story concerns an insurance salesman, Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray), bedazzled by a steamy adulterous wife, Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck). Together they conspire to get rid of her husband. The lethal romance begins with crackling, double-entendre intensity:

Phyllis: Mr. Neff, why don't you drop by tomorrow evening around 8:30? He'll be in then.

Neff: Who?

Phyllis: My husband. You were anxious to talk to *him*, weren't you?

Neff: Yeah, I was. But I'm sort of getting over the idea, if you know what I mean.

Phyllis: There's a speed limit in this state, Mr. Neff, 45 miles an hour.

Neff: How fast was I going, Officer?

Phyllis: I'd say around 90.

Neff: Suppose you get down off your motorcycle and give me a ticket.

Phyllis: Suppose I let you off with a warning this time.

Neff: Suppose it doesn't take.

Phyllis: Suppose I have to whack you over the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knuckles.

Neff: Suppose I bust out crying and put my head on your shoulder.

Phyllis: Suppose you try putting it on my husband's shoulder.

Neff: That tears it. Tomorrow evening, then.

Phyllis: That's what I suggested.

Neff: You'll be here, too?

Phyllis: I guess so. I usually am.

Neff: Same chair, same perfume, same anklet?

Phyllis: I wonder if I know what you mean.

Neff: I wonder if you wonder.

Dietrichson's killing is made to look like an accident. Neff's buddy, Barton Keyes (Edward G. Robinson), is an insurance investigator in the same office. He believes that the mishap was actually murder and spends the rest of the film vainly attempting to identify the killer. *Double Indemnity* ends with Neff shot by Phyllis, bleeding to death on the office floor as he makes his confession.

Neff: You know why you didn't figure this one, Keyes? Let me tell you. The guy you were looking for was too close. He was right across the desk from you.

Keyes: Closer than that, Walter. (*The eyes of the two men meet in a moment of silence.*)

Neff: I love you, too.

As the name implies, film noirs have usually come in shades of black. True, there have been Technicolor imitations—*Body Heat*, *L.A. Confidential*, *Chinatown*, dramas in which the protagonist, in classic style, winds up lured by a conniving woman into a maelstrom of greed and corruption. But these films would have been impossible to make without their B&W predecessors: *Lady from Shanghai*, with Rita Hayworth as the femme fatale and Orson Welles as her prey; *The Blue Dahlia*, with Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake as victim and victimizer; *Out of the Past*, with Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer; and any one of a dozen Humphrey Bogart movies. No one can truly understand American cinema without seeing *The Maltese Falcon*, with Bogie as Sam Spade and Mary Astor as the villainess; *The Big Sleep*—the first meeting of Bogart and the future Mrs. B., Lauren Bacall; and their second pairing, *To Have and Have Not*. ("You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve? You just put your lips together and blow.")

B&W films relied heavily on trenchant lines like that, one reason why so many have entered the conversational mainstream. Marlon Brando uttered his most famous words in his fourth movie, *On the Waterfront*: "I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been *somebody*." (Twenty-six years later—in *Raging Bull*, a black-and-white biopic about Jake LaMotta—Robert De Niro paid homage by repeating those lines, word for word, in the boxer's dressing room.) Gregory Peck's advice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* summed up race relations better than any editorial: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it." Bogart was at his most romantic when he said good-bye to Ingrid Bergman at the Casablanca airport: "I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you'll understand that. Here's looking at you, kid."

Bette Davis's warning in *All About Eve* has echoed down the decades: "Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy night." As has Groucho Marx's recollection in *Animal Crackers*: "One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in my pajamas, I don't know." And Joe E. Brown's forgiving comment in *Some Like It Hot*, when he learns that the woman he loves is a female impersonator: "Well, nobody's perfect."

Another genre fills the end-of-the-year TV schedule: the Christmas movie. Most films in that category rerun without leaving a trace, but there are some notable exceptions. *It's a Wonderful Life*, made in 1946, has become as endearing and perennial as Dickens's *A*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Christmas Carol. For three generations, families have eagerly repeated the words of Henry Travers in the role of Clarence the Angel. Attempting to save the suicidal George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart), Clarence shows what would have occurred in George's absence: "Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" Another B&W perennial also unreels every December. Cornball it may be, but *Miracle on 34th Street*, also a film from the 1940s, still beguiles little boys and girls, thanks to Edmund Gwenn's persuasive portrait of a white-bearded gent hired as a Macy's Santa and Maureen O'Hara's turn as a skeptical mother whose child believes that he is the genuine article.

No doubt the permanence of these movies has to do with their era. They're suffused with the postwar euphoria of the late 1940s, when rationing had disappeared from the American scene and the only items in short supply were cynicism and self-doubt. More recent Christmas films attempt to be colorful rather than fantastic and to use irony rather than faith and goodwill. Even the titles bear mocking subtexts—*Scrooged*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, *The Santa Clause*—as if any display of sentiment would mark the filmmakers as squares in an edgy world. Black-and-white has no place here. It speaks directly to the heart, and that's not often the organ that modern movies hope to stimulate.

Some two decades ago, Ted Turner came up with one of his most dubious schemes. To entice the young back into the tent, he ordered minions to banish B&W films by colorizing them. "Those fools!" Billy Wilder exploded. "Do they really think that colorization will make *The Informer* any better? Or *Citizen Kane* or *Casablanca*? Or do they hope to palm off some of the old stinkers by dipping them in 31 flavors?" Other directors added their own catcalls. "To change someone's work without any regard to his wishes shows a total contempt for film, for the director, and for the public," said Woody Allen. (Allen had deliberately rejected color when he made *Stardust Memories* and *Manhattan* "because the city photographs so well in black-and-white. And New York is so familiar to me in black-and-white, probably because of growing up with the tabloids.") Elliot Silverstein, an officer of the Directors Guild of America, wasted no time with niceties: Turner's people were "lifting their legs on people's work." And when Orson Welles heard that *Kane* might be colorized, he growled: "Keep Ted Turner and his damned Crayolas off of my picture."

Those damned Crayolas were put away in the mid-1990s when Turner and his techies met two unexpected hurdles. First, the price of colorization became prohibitive. Second, viewers joined directors and critics to complain about the process's ludicrous comic-book tones. From that point on, we've been able to see features the way their creators intended.

Ironically, some of the greatest American B&W movies now regularly show on the Turner Classic Movie channel. They're also available online from Netflix, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other sites. The curious searcher can find the atmospheric Sherlock Holmes mysteries, every Astaire-Rogers musical, the archetypal horrors, a five-DVD set called *The Ultimate Film Noir Collection*, such early sci-fi adventures as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and much, much more—including the *best* Hollywood movie about Hollywood: *Sunset Boulevard*. In that film, a down-at-the-heels screenwriter, Joe Gillis (William Holden), meets an aging B&W star (Gloria Swanson). "You used to be big!" he exclaims. Haughtily, she replies: "I *am* big. It's the pictures that got small."

Skeptics can test the truth of her remark easily enough. Hit a few computer keys and order some B&W classics. Once seen, these major American films cannot be *un*seen—as those New Rochelle teenagers can testify. Ten minutes into the screening of *Twelve Angry Men*, they stopped complaining. The next day, they asked to see it again. ▩

UNITED ARTISTS/PHOTOFEST

Robert Mitchum in the chilling *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), a B&W cult classic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Urbanities

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Oh, to England

Childhood's End

Theodore Dalrymple

Britain, land of bleak houses and low expectations

Britain is the worst country in the Western world in which to be a child, according to a recent UNICEF report. Ordinarily, I would not set much store by such a report; but in this case, I think it must be right—not because I know so much about childhood in all the other 20 countries examined but because the childhood that many British parents give to their offspring is so awful that it is hard to conceive of worse, at least on a mass scale. The two poles of contemporary British child rearing are neglect and overindulgence.

Consider one British parent, Fiona MacKeown, who in November 2007 went on a six-month vacation to Goa, India, with her boyfriend and eight of her nine children by five different fathers, none of whom ever contributed financially for long to the children's upkeep. (The child left behind—her eldest, at 19—was a drug addict.) She received $50,000 in welfare benefits a year, and doubtless decided—quite rationally, under the circumstances—that the money would go further, and that life would thus be more agreeable, in Goa than in her native Devon.

Reaching Goa, MacKeown soon decided to travel with seven of her children to Kerala, leaving behind one of them, 15-year-old Scarlett Keeling, to live with a tour guide ten years her elder, whom the mother had known for only a short time. Scarlett reportedly claimed to have had sex with this man only because she needed a roof over her head. According to a witness, she was constantly on drugs; and one night, she went to a bar where she drank a lot and took several different illicit drugs, including LSD, cocaine, and pot. She was seen leaving the bar late, almost certainly intoxicated.

The next morning, her body turned up on a beach. At first, the local police maintained that she had drowned while high, but further examination proved that someone had raped and then forcibly drowned her. So far, three people have been arrested in the investigation, which is continuing.

About a month later, Scarlett's mother, interviewed by the liberal Sunday newspaper the *Observer*, expressed surprise at the level of public vituperation aimed at her and her lifestyle in the aftermath of the murder. She agreed that she and her children lived on welfare, but "not by conscious choice," and she couldn't see anything wrong with her actions in India apart from a certain naivety in trusting the man in whose care she had left her daughter. Scarlett was always an independent girl, and if she, the mother, could turn the clock back, she would behave exactly the same way again.

It is not surprising that someone in Fiona MacKeown's position would deny negligence; to acknowledge it would be too painful. But—and this is what is truly disturbing—when the newspaper asked four supposed child-rearing experts for their opinions, only one saw anything wrong with the mother's behavior, and even she offered only muted criticism. It was always difficult to know how much independence to grant an adolescent, the expert said; but in her view, the mother had granted too much too quickly to Scarlett.

Even that seemed excessively harsh to the *Observer*'s Barbara Ellen. We should not criticize the mother's way of life, she wrote, since it had nothing to do with her daughter's death: "Scarlett died for the simple fact that she was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people, as well as being blitzed with drugs, late at night, in a foreign country." On this view, being in the wrong place at the wrong time

KATE GREENAWAY/VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON/ART RESOURCE, NY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Growing up in today's England is far from the idyll depicted in this nineteenth-century lithograph.

with the wrong people is a raw fact of nature, not the result of human agency, decision, education, or taste. It could happen to anybody, and it just happened to happen to Scarlett. As for drugs, they emerge from the ether and blitz people completely at random. It all seems very unfair.

A columnist for the left-wing *Guardian* took a similarly exculpatory line:

> Anyone taking even a fleeting glance at recent news will have picked up a crucial message: women with children by more than one partner are apparently hussies, who deserve everything they get. The opprobrium . . . served up to Fiona MacKeown, mother of murdered 15-year-old, Scarlett Keeling . . . has been hideous to behold. The spitting criticism is particularly interesting when you compare it to attitudes to men in the public eye. Rod Stewart (seven children by five women), Jack Nicholson (five children by four women), and Mick Jagger (seven children by four women) are painted as great, swinging studs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anyone else smell a vile double standard?

No one criticizes Rod Stewart, Jack Nicholson, or Mick Jagger for how they behave; therefore, apparently, there was nothing wrong with how Fiona MacKeown behaved.

It is worth remembering that the *Observer* and the *Guardian* are not the publications of a lunatic fringe but the preferred newspapers of the British intelligentsia, of those who work in the educational and social services, and of broadcasting elites (the BBC advertises vacancies almost exclusively in the *Guardian*). Not every person who reads these newspapers agrees with everything written in them—and both, commendably, offer a little space to writers whose worldview differs from their own—but the general moral tone must be one with which most readers agree. In other words, it is likely that a large part of the educated elite sees nothing wrong, or at least affects to see nothing wrong, with MacKeown's conduct.

This nonjudgmentalism surely helps explain why British youth are among the Western world's leaders in such indicators of social pathology as teenage pregnancy, violence, criminality, underage drinking, and consumption of illicit drugs. Britain has the third-highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the industrialized world, according to the UNICEF report (only the United States and New Zealand are higher)—a startling case recently made headlines of 16-, 14-, and 12-year-old sisters, all of whom gave birth within a year of one another. British children have the earliest and highest consumption of cocaine of any young people in Europe, are ten times more likely to sniff solvents than are Greek children, and are six to seven times more likely to smoke pot than are Swedish children. Almost a third of British young people aged 11, 13, and 15 say they have been drunk at least twice.

What explains the nonjudgmental attitude among elites? The reluctance to criticize Fiona MacKeown might be an expression of sympathy for someone in the throes of grief: however foolishly (or worse) she behaved, she certainly did not deserve the murder of her daughter. Furthermore, the *Guardian* and *Observer* journalists might argue, we do not know enough about the details of her life to criticize her fairly. Perhaps she is a good mother in most respects; perhaps her children, apart from the drug addict and the murdered Scarlett, are happy, and will lead lives of fulfillment and achievement. After all, no style of upbringing guarantees success or, for that matter, failure; and therefore we should suspend judgment about her.

I suspect, however, that the main consideration inhibiting elite criticism of MacKeown is that passing judgment would call into question the shibboleths of liberal social policy for the last 50 or 60 years—beliefs that give their proponents a strong sense of moral superiority. It would be to entertain the heretical thought that family structure might matter after all, along with such qualities as self-restraint and self-respect; and that welfare dependency is unjust to those who pay for it and disastrous for those who wind up trapped in it.

One day after Scarlett Keeling's murder, a nine-year-old girl, Shannon Matthews, went missing from her home in Dewsbury, in northern England. Twenty-four days later, after an extensive police search, she was found alive, locked in a drawer under a bed in her stepfather's uncle's house. Police soon arrested the stepfather, 22-year-old Craig Meehan, for possession of 140 pornographic pictures of children, and charged the uncle, Michael Donovan, with kidnapping. Shannon's mother, Karen Matthews, 32, was also arrested, for child cruelty, neglect, and obstructing the police by lying during the search for her daughter.

Karen Matthews, who received welfare payments of $40,000 a year, had borne seven children to five different men. She called two of her children with the same father "the twins," thus transferring the meaning of "twin" from the relatively unusual biological occurrence of double birth to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what she clearly thought the equally unusual social circumstance of full siblinghood. Three of her children lived with their fathers, and four lived with her and Meehan, whom Shannon reportedly regarded as her father. Shannon's true father—one Leon Rose, who has since "moved on" to live with another "partner"—apparently was happy to find himself usurped by the young Meehan; but Karen Matthews's brother reported that Shannon often spoke of Meehan's violence to her and of her deep unhappiness at home.

The reasons for Shannon's abduction have not yet emerged, but again the *Guardian* managed to distract the reader's attention from less than optimal family arrangements. Instead, it ran an upbeat story on the housing project where the Matthews family lived; that way, the obvious could be ignored rather than denied. The *Sun*, a tabloid newspaper whose readership is virtually entirely working-class, had described the project as "like Beirut—only worse." But the *Guardian*, whose readership is largely middle-class and employed in the public sector, drew attention to the improvements that had taken place in the project, thanks to the local council's having spent $8 million on it over the last three years—supplying traffic bollards shaped like penguins, for example. Before the improvements, one resident said, "We'd houses burgled, sheds burned, caravans blown up." Now, only one house in 90 is robbed per year; and, thanks to the penguins, joy-riding by youths in stolen cars is presumably much reduced. The implication is clear: with more public spending of this kind everywhere in the country, administered by *Guardian* readers and their peers, everything will be all right. It won't matter in the slightest if children either have no fathers, or different fathers every few years.

One might dismiss the stories of Scarlett Keeling and Shannon Matthews as the kind of horrific things that can take place in any society from time to time. But I think that they are the tip of an iceberg. As the liberal newspapers' response shows, the problem with British childhood is by no means confined to the underclass. Our society has lost the most elementary common sense about what children need.

More than four out of ten British children are born out of wedlock; the unions of which they are the issue are notoriously unstable. Even marriage has lost much of its meaning. In a post-religious society, it is no longer a sacrament. The government has ensured that marriage brings no fiscal advantages and, indeed, for those at the lower end of the social scale, that it has only disadvantages. Easy divorce means that a quarter of all marriages break up within a decade.

The results of this social dysfunction are grim for children. Eighty percent of British children have televisions in their bedrooms, more than have their biological fathers at home. Fifty-eight percent of British children eat their evening meal in front of the television (a British child spends more than five hours per day watching a screen); 36 percent never eat any meals together with other family members; and 34 percent of households do not even own dining tables. In the prison where I once worked, I discovered that many inmates had never eaten at a table together with someone else.

Let me speculate briefly on the implications of these startling facts. They mean that children never learn, from a sense of social obligation, to eat when not hungry, or not to eat when they are. Appetite is all they need consult in deciding whether to eat—a purely egotistical outlook. Hence anything that interferes with the satisfaction of appetite will seem oppressive. They do not learn such elementary social practices as sharing or letting others go first. Since mealtimes are usually when families get to converse, the children do not learn the art of conversation, either; listening to what others say becomes a challenge. There is a time and place for everything: if I feel like it, the time is now, and the place is here.

If children are not taught self-control, they do not learn it. Violence against teachers is increasing: injuries suffered by teachers at the hands of pupils

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rose 20 percent between 2000 and 2006, and in one survey, which may or may not be representative, 53 percent of teachers had objects thrown at them, 26 percent had been attacked with furniture or equipment, 2 percent had been threatened with a knife, and 1 percent with a gun. Nearly 40 percent of teachers have taken time off to recover from violent incidents at students' hands. About a quarter of British teachers have been assaulted by their students over the last year.

The British, never fond of children, have lost all knowledge or intuition about how to raise them; as a consequence, they now fear them, perhaps the most terrible augury possible for a society. The signs of this fear are unmistakable on the faces of the elderly in public places. An involuntary look of distaste, even barely controlled terror, crosses their faces if a group of young teens approaches; then they try to look as if they are not really there, hoping to avoid trouble. And the children themselves are afraid. The police say that many children as young as eight are carrying knives for protection. Violent attacks by the young between ten and 17, usually on other children, have risen by 35 percent in the last four years.

The police, assuming that badly behaved children will become future criminals, have established probably the largest database of DNA profiles in the world: 1.1 million samples from children aged ten to 18, taken over the last decade, and at an accelerating rate (some law enforcement officials have advocated that every child should have a DNA profile on record). Since the criminal-justice system reacts to the commission of serious crimes hardly at all, however, British youth do not object to the gathering of the samples: they know that they largely act with impunity, profiles or no profiles.

The British may have always inclined toward harshness or neglect (or both) in dealing with children; but never before have they combined such attitudes with an undiscriminating material indulgence. My patients would sometimes ask me how it was that their children had turned out so bad when they had done everything for them. When I asked them what they meant by "everything," it invariably meant the latest televisions in their bedrooms or the latest fashionable footwear—to which modern British youth attaches far more importance than Imelda Marcos ever did.

Needless to say, the British state's response to the situation that it has in part created is simultaneously authoritarian and counterproductive. The government pretends, for example, that the problem of child welfare is one of raw poverty. Britain does have the highest rate of child poverty, bar the United States, in the West, as defined (as it usually is) by the percentage of children living in households with an income of less than 50 percent of the median. (Whether this is a sensible definition of poverty is a subject rarely broached.) But after many years of various redistributive measures and billions spent to reduce it, child poverty is, if anything, more widespread.

The British government thus pursues social welfare policies that encourage the creation of households like the Matthews', and then seeks, via yet more welfare spending, to reduce the harm done to children in them. But was the Matthews household poor, in any but an artificial sense? At the time of Shannon's current stepfather's arrest, the household income was $72,000; it lived free of rent and local taxes, and it boasted three computers and a large plasma-screen television. Would another $5,000 or $10,000 or $20,000 have made any difference?

A system of perverse incentives in a culture of undiscriminating materialism, where the main freedom is freedom from legal, financial, ethical, or social consequences, makes childhood in Britain a torment both for many of those who live it and those who observe it. Yet the British government will do anything but address the problem, or that part of the problem that is its duty to address: the state-encouraged breakdown of the family. If one were a Marxist, one might see in this refusal the self-interest of the state-employee class: social problems, after all, are their raison d'être.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

Potemkin Green

To the editor:

Excellent article [Max Schulz, "California's Potemkin Environmentalism," Spring 2008], but it omitted the large, glowing gorilla in the cellar: the problem of radioactive waste's lasting for 1,000 years has not yet been solved. How long can we keep burying that stuff? We remain between rocks and hard places.

C. M. Griffith
Middletown, MD

To the editor:

Your libertarian, anti-California article does not mention the atrocious effects of deregulating California's energy market. To say that California unjustly relies on importing energy from other western states is completely missing the point. The real issue is the effect of deregulation on the supply and cost of energy to customers in California. California's forward-thinking energy policies have nothing to do with an under-supplied grid and infrastructure within the state, and everything to do with the near-term need to reduce our dependency on fossil-fuel-based energy—as the crisis of 2000–01 demonstrated.

Scott Shepard
Benicia, CA

'68ers

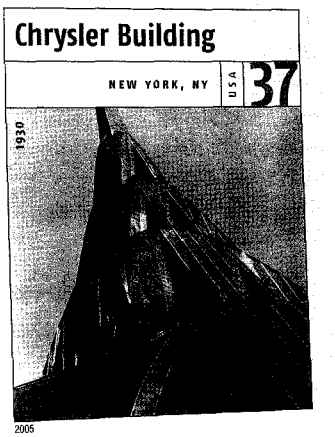
To the editor:

It's amazing to read these recollections [Christopher Hitchens, Kay S. Hymowitz, Stefan Kanfer, Guy Sorman, Harry Stein, and Sol Stern, "May 1968: Forty Years Later," Spring 2008] and to realize that none of these people expresses much embarrassment. Here's a history lesson you can all participate in: take out an American dollar bill, then a five-dollar bill. Behold the two faces on those two pieces of currency. The one-dollar bill bears the face of the greatest revolutionary who ever lived. The five-dollar bill bears the face of that revolution's great redeemer and defender—the greatest American who ever lived. Note: this information was available in 1968. Totalitarianism—communism and fascism—was defeated by the USA with precious little help, if not outright resistance, from the clueless authors of this piece.

John Campbell
Chicago, IL

To the editor:

I enjoyed Mr. Hitchens's self-important tirade but could not help but notice his passing attack on the "pseudo-radicals" of Generation Y. Hitchens has this exactly wrong; while Obamamaniacs and members of the "Ron Paul Revolution" are highly visible in university towns, the current generation seems guided by a nonideological ethic of service. This stands in sharp contrast to Hitchens's youthful activism on behalf of a Trotskyite ideology that, with the benefit of hindsight, is downright laughable. While members of the Millennial generation are less apt to wave pickets and sing clever chants, we are more likely to enlist in



MIKE SEGAR/REUTERS/CORBIS

efforts to improve our communities through Teach for America, AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, or numerous other outlets.

Hitchens has every right to wax nostalgic about his days as a naive ideologue, but he bashes the current generation in a fashion that betrays his ignorance of the subject. Frankly, he ought to be more embarrassed about helping to keep alive a defective nineteenth-century ideology. I, for one, eagerly await the retirement of the baby boomers, whose pretentiousness and self-importance have defined an era.

Nolan Klouda
Lawrence, KS

To the editor:

You are all a lost generation.

Eric
New York, NY

Planet Bellow

To the editor:

While reading Myron Magnet's trenchant reexamination of Saul Bellow's novel *Mr.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

Sammler's Planet ["Mr. Sammler's City," Spring 2008], I could not help but be reminded of another character, this one real, who could easily have been in the audience at Sammler's informal talk at Columbia in the late 1960s: Edward Said, then professor of literature at the university. Over the years, and right up until his death, Said would refer to Bellow's novel with barely concealed contempt in books and interviews. He repeatedly criticized what he considered its "racism," "reactionary turn," and "unfortunate presage of the rise of neoconservatism," and found the infamous scene with the black man in the camel's-hair coat especially lamentable. It's interesting to note that throughout the next quarter-century, Said would consistently give his support and prestige to the very forces of disorder and destruction that Bellow saw capturing the elites at that fictional talk—whether they took the form of vandals on New York's Upper West Side or terrorists on Israel's West Bank. If only the professor had been a closer reader!

Robert Nason
Whitestone, NY

To the editor:

Despite a long career as a professor of American literature, I never got around to reading *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. Thank you for drawing my attention to this egregious neglect. Your review is a powerful presentation of the sense of despair that gripped America, and from which our nation has yet to recover. Obama brilliantly exploits our yearning for hope and renewal, but I fear that he is adept only at three-card monte.

Frank Gado
White River Junction, VT

Surrender

To the editor:

Great article [Bruce Bawer, "An Anatomy of Surrender," Spring 2008]. Rowan Williams's quotation was hilarious. It is interesting to compare the Muslims' worldwide riots in response to the Danish cartoons with our own virtual nonresponse to events like 7/7. The West is not the "House of War"—it is the "House of Sheep."

Sarah Bellum
Thousand Oaks, CA

To the editor:

I've followed Bruce Bawer's writing over the years, and I'm grateful for his honest and intelligent approach to this craziness we in the West find ourselves confronting. Multiculturalism and political correctness must be fought tirelessly in order for our way of life to prevail. I'm reminded of a quotation from James Baldwin: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

Deborah Durkee
Marietta, GA

To the editor:

It would appear that a philosophy built on secular humanism is incapable of defending the freedoms under which secular humanism can flourish. Mr. Bawer winds up his article by saying that the U.S. has been more effective than Europe in combating Islamofascism because of the First Amendment. I disagree. American society has not yet succumbed to the Islamists because we have many more churchgoers than Europe does. The very people whom the Left in the U.S. and in Europe hold in contempt are the ones defending Western values. So much for the man of the Left who says, "I disagree with what you say but will defend to the death your right to say it." Hah. They haven't got the guts.

Timothy Nelson
Lansdowne, PA

Crime and Race

To the editor:

The American situation [Heather Mac Donald, "Is the Criminal-Justice System Racist?," Spring 2008] is exactly mirrored in Britain. The courts have a disproportionate caseload involving young blacks because they commit a disproportionate number of crimes. By contrast, the Chinese are probably the most law-abiding community in Britain. I have never seen one in court.

Brian Gunn
Justice of the Peace
Nottingham County, England

City Journal *welcomes letters to the editor.*
e-mail: letters@city-journal.org
fax: 212-599-0371
More letters are posted at www.city-journal.org.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contributors

Michael Knox Beran is a contributing editor of *City Journal*. His most recent book is *Forge of Empires 1861–1871: Three Revolutionary Statesmen and the World They Made*.

Theodore Dalrymple, a physician, is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and the Dietrich Weismann Fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Nicole Gelinas, a *City Journal* contributing editor and the Searle Freedom Trust Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, is a Chartered Financial Analyst.

Edward L. Glaeser is a professor of economics at Harvard University, where he has taught since 1992, and a Manhattan Institute senior fellow.

Paul Howard is the director of the Manhattan Institute's Center for Medical Progress and the managing editor of its web-based journal, Medical Progress Today.

Stefan Kanfer, a contributing editor of *City Journal* and a former editor of *Time*, is the author, most recently, of *The Voodoo That They Did So Well*. His biography of Marlon Brando, *Somebody*, will be published by Knopf this fall.

Heather Mac Donald is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and the John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Her latest book, coauthored with Victor Davis Hanson and Steven Malanga, is *The Immigration Solution*.

Myron Magnet is the author of *The Dream and the Nightmare: The Sixties' Legacy to the Underclass*. He is *City Journal*'s editor-at-large and was its editor from 1994 through 2006.

Steven Malanga is senior editor of *City Journal* and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. He is the author of *The New New Left*, a collection of his *City Journal* essays.

John Renehan is a captain in the U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division. He was formerly an assistant corporation counsel at the New York City Law Department.

Guy Sorman, a *City Journal* contributing editor, is the author of numerous books, most recently *The Empire of Lies: The Truth About China in the Twenty-First Century*. His article was translated from the French by Ralph C. Hancock.

Harry Stein, a contributing editor of *City Journal*, is the author of *How I Accidentally Joined the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy (and Found Inner Peace)*.

Sol Stern is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and the author of *Breaking Free: Public School Lessons and the Imperative of School Choice*.

Jerry Weinberger is a professor of political science at Michigan State University, director of the LeFrak Forum at Michigan State, and an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute. His most recent book is *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought*.

Soundings:
André Glucksmann is a French philosopher. His article was translated from the French by Ralph C. Hancock. **Andrew Klavan,** a *City Journal* contributing editor, is the author, most recently, of the novel *Empire of Lies*. **Judith Miller** is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist who writes about national security issues.

Artists:
Alberto Mena is the graphics and imaging director of *BusinessWeek*. **Arnold Roth** is a cartoonist whose work has appeared in *Punch*, *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and many other publications. **Harvey Wang** is a widely acclaimed photographer and award-winning filmmaker who has published five books of photography, including *Flophouse: Life on the Bowery* and *Harvey Wang's New York*. For cover artist **Doug Safranek,** see page 2.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I Am Not Having a Crisis

John Renehan

I am unusual, apparently. It's not because I am a coffeehouse dweller, or an NPR listener, or prone to wear loafers with jeans. In the world I inhabited until recently, all of these are quite normal. Rather, it is that I am also a field artillery officer in the U.S. Army. Which places me in that subdemographic of New York lawyers who wear suits and work in office buildings until they decide to join the military and blow things up. (Trust me, there are some; just not many.) For this decision, I now endure lingering looks of concern from people who care about me.

I knew that friends and colleagues would be surprised. Prior to 2004, the year I left for basic training, I had shown no tendency toward reckless acts like joining the military. Nor did my colleagues know that members of my family had, in previous generations, routinely done stints in the armed services during times of national need. So I was prepared for a certain range of responses in New York, from puzzlement to backslapping support to outrage.

What I wasn't prepared for was the quality of some people's reactions—not simply surprise or distress, but something deeper and more permanent. People I had known for years started behaving differently toward me. This is a tough thing to put your finger on—but you can sense it. You can tell when you are being *discussed*, when people are trying to decide if they know you as well as they had thought.

At first, I thought this deep concern was mostly grounded in politics: a good proportion of my friends and colleagues in the civilian world had opposed American action in Iraq. But that wasn't it. At the time, at least, even adamant opponents of the original invasion tended to agree that our continued presence in some capacity was now necessary in order to "do right" by Iraq. Nor was it my age (I was 32 when I left for basic training). To the extent that my former colleagues knew people in military service, those people were largely reservists—JAG lawyers in mid-career, for example—who tended to be older than the average active-duty service member of equivalent rank. Nor had I started speaking in military lingo and wearing RANGER T-shirts.

No, at the end of the day, the issue was simply that I had joined the military. And that act was just too foreign for some in my old circles to recognize as having arisen from the normal range of motivations—chosen as one might choose to go back to school, or perform charity work, or embark on any other course that might prove rewarding. In their cosmopolitan world—my former and sometime world—wartime stints in the military just aren't done. Not when one has other options—which everyone in that world always has.

Thus my decision demands psychological explanation. Perhaps I am in personal crisis. Perhaps I believe that Saddam Hussein knocked down the buildings that used to stand a block from my old office. Perhaps I am angry. The possibility that I am doing an ordinary thing done by many ordinary Americans at all times seems not to have occurred to them.

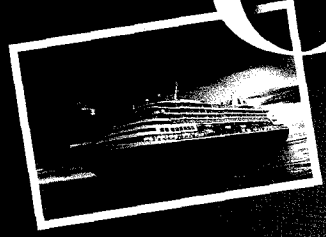
And so their puzzlement continues. One distressed friend, hearing of my present employment, pounds the table and unleashes obscenities. Another tells people she thinks I've "changed." (My oldest friends tell me I haven't, which is a comfort.) And another tells me that she's happy "that you're doing something you care about," with the forced enthusiasm of a supportive parent. All of which I try to take with good humor. But I wonder how we came to a point at which young persons—of a class that once viewed military service as an ordinary expression of its own privileged relationship to the state—could come to see the act of entering service as an oddity requiring special explanation.

I say to those concerned looks and furrowed brows: Relax. I'm still me. I'm not suffering an early midlife crisis (or any other kind). I'm not searching for something or running away from something else. I'm not angry, and I'm not trying to make a statement. I'm just doing some military service, at a time when that service can do some good.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roger Kimball and the editors of

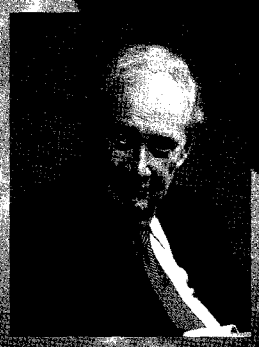
The New Criterion



invite you to join us aboard the ms Veendam

January 25 - February 1, 2009

Guest speakers to include:



Judge Robert H. Bork is a Distinguished Fellow at the Hudson Institute. He has served as Solicitor General, acting Attorney General of the United States and as a federal circuit court judge.

Anthony Daniels writes a column for the *London Spectator*, contributes frequently to the *Daily Telegraph*, is a contributing editor of the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*, and has been a prolific contributor to *The New Criterion*.

Roger Kimball is Co-editor and Publisher of *The New Criterion*, President and Publisher of Encounter Books, and an art critic for the *London Spectator* and *National Review*.

David Pryce-Jones is a senior editor at *National Review* and an acclaimed novelist and historian. Mr. Pryce-Jones lectures widely and is a regular contributor to *The New Criterion*, *Commentary*, *National Review*, and many other publications.

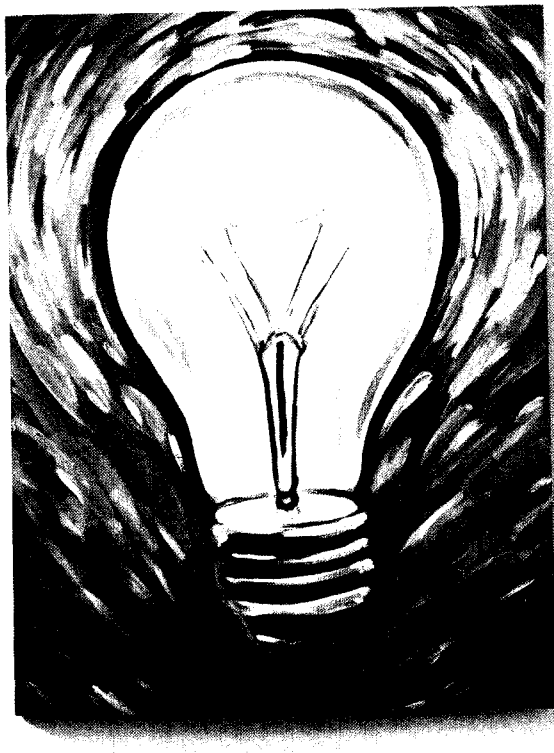
Mark Steyn is the author of the best-selling *America Alone: The End of The World As We Know It*. He is a columnist for *National Review* and *The Chicago Sun-Times*.

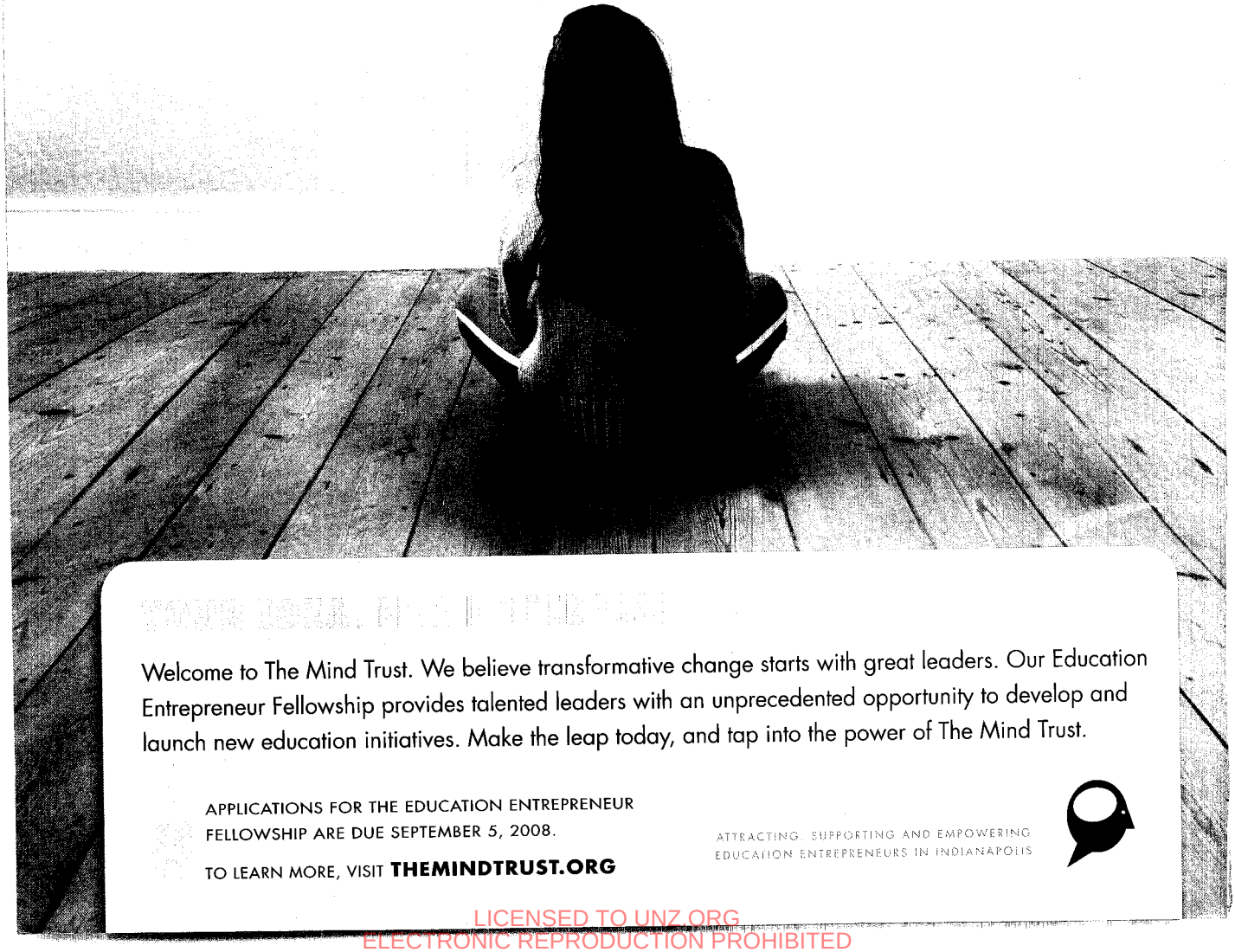
THE CRUISE AUTHORITY

For more information or to book your cruise, please visit www.tnccruise.com or contact The Cruise Authority at 1-800-707-1634.

Important: In order to participate in *The New Criterion* Cruise events, this cruise must be booked only via The Cruise Authority.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





Welcome to The Mind Trust. We believe transformative change starts with great leaders. Our Education Entrepreneur Fellowship provides talented leaders with an unprecedented opportunity to develop and launch new education initiatives. Make the leap today, and tap into the power of The Mind Trust.

APPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION ENTREPRENEUR FELLOWSHIP ARE DUE SEPTEMBER 5, 2008.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT **THEMINDTRUST.ORG**

ATTRACTING, SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING EDUCATION ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIANAPOLIS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED